

Copyright

by

Katherine Charek Briggs

2012

**The Thesis Committee for Katherine Charek Briggs  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

**"The Most Dangerous Place":  
Race, Neoliberalism, and Anti-Abortion Discourses**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

---

Jennifer Fuller

---

Domino Renee Perez

**"The Most Dangerous Place":  
Race, Neoliberalism, and Anti-Abortion Discourses**

by

**Katherine Charek Briggs, B.A.**

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

and

**Master of Science in Information Studies**

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

## **Dedication**

For my parents

## **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to my thesis supervisors, Jennifer Fuller and Domino Perez, whose insight and patience were instrumental to the completion of this project.

Special thanks to Kristen Hogan for her generous and ongoing support of my many lives as a student and activist.

I owe my ever-expanding feminism to Ana Ixchel Rosal and her grace and power in educating and inspiring me.

## **Abstract**

### **"The Most Dangerous Place": Race, Neoliberalism, and Anti-Abortion Discourses**

Katherine Charek Briggs, MA/MSIS  
The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Jennifer Fuller

Crisis pregnancy center advertisements like billboards that ask whether a downcast woman of color is "Pregnant? Scared?" appear to be a locus of the overlapping factors of United States racial politics, bodily control, and a neoliberal sensibility. In order to investigate these relationships, I situate analyses of anti-abortion media products alongside current U.S. political discourses. What is the relationship between the elements of racism and bodily control in CPC visual rhetoric and growing neoliberal culture? This project brings these factors into a dialogue by analyzing the anti-abortion rhetoric shaped by CPC organizations and the white U.S. mainstream. As I discuss in Chapter One, anti-abortion organizations target specific communities and use large-scale media advertising to retain disproportionate control over the image of abortion in the U.S. cultural imaginary. The second chapter details how that imaginary and the current political situation overlap in immigration, population, and border panic that reduces Latinas to sexualized stereotypes. In Chapter Three, I report on the U.S. medical and political

systems' shameful oppression of black women's reproductive freedom in order to situate the advertising rhetoric of three more anti-abortion organizations. The discourses these groups perpetrate are all reflected in the moral individualism of a growing neoliberal social politic. In sum, anti-abortion organizations use neoliberal rhetoric and racialized advertising to perpetuate destructive discourses of what it means to be a person of color in reproductive crisis. These discourses approach race with entrenched stereotypes, paternalistic moralizing, and euphemistic concern for low-income people of color. A critical feminist lens helps draw serious attention to dangerous patterns in anti-abortion rhetoric and the politics of race and reproductive justice.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Locus of study.....	2
Methodological framework.....	5
Theoretical framework.....	6
Project overview.....	9
Chapter One: Crisis pregnancy center discourses and self-representation in the public sphere.....	10
Crisis pregnancy centers and message control.....	11
Encountering the discourses: Materials and public space.....	13
Intended audiences and direct targets.....	16
Neoliberal media culture and anti-abortion rhetoric.....	22
Current politics: Race and restrictions.....	26
Chapter Two: Latina sexualities and immigration panic.....	31
Latina/os as a constructed population and market.....	32
Political situation: Xenophobia and borders.....	34
The rhetoric of Latina sexual stereotypes.....	37
Case study: Vitae Foundation advertisements .....	38
Discussion.....	48
Chapter Three: Blackness, dangerous sexuality, and urban initiatives.....	50
Black women and a history of reproductive control.....	50
Case study: Heroic Media.....	54
Case study: TooManyAborted.com.....	63
Case study: Care Net and urban initiatives.....	68
Neoliberal rhetoric, policy, and the black welfare mother.....	72
Discussion.....	74



Conclusion.....	76
Appendix.....	81
References.....	86

## Introduction

Reproductive rights and access to pregnancy termination may be the most consistently contested (and protested) social issues in the United States. Activists on both sides of the issue evoke arguments stemming from the discourses of feminism, medicine, ethics, law, and government support with particular focus on federal funding for abortion services. In response to reproductive health care providers such as Planned Parenthood, other agencies have been founded to convince women<sup>1</sup> to carry unwanted pregnancies to term. These organizations, which often receive federal funding, are called pregnancy resource centers or crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs). CPCs often advertise across various media in order to draw in their target populations, usually women without other support systems, who have little information, or are in a time of crisis: women who CPCs sometimes identify as women of color<sup>2</sup>. Some anti-abortion organizations exist purely to supply CPCs with advertisements and visual rhetoric that make very public statements about the value of unplanned pregnancies, especially in black and Latina/o communities. These racial politics are at the forefront of the anti-abortion discourses in CPC advertisements and mission statements, while the U.S. is entrenched in problematic social welfare and immigration policies which disproportionately affect people of color. Furthermore, reproductive health is under attack: 2011 showed record numbers of

---

<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that pregnancy and reproductive health directly affect people of all genders, and I attempt to use gender-neutral language ("people in reproductive crisis") interchangeably with the female terms ("impacting women") used by the scholars and organizations with whom I engage for this project.

<sup>2</sup> "Care Net | About Us." Care Net. Accessed March 10, 2012. <https://www.care-net.org/aboutus/>.

abortion restrictions driven by a neoliberal politic that denies the power of social systems and moralizes personal responsibility.

The crisis pregnancy center advertisements, the billboards asking whether a stony-faced brown woman is "Pregnant? Scared?", appear to be the locus of the overlapping factors of racial politics, bodily control, and a neoliberal sensibility. In order to investigate these relationships, I situate analyses of anti-abortion media products alongside current U.S. political discourses. What is the relationship between the elements of racism and bodily control in CPC visual rhetoric and growing neoliberal culture? The next three chapters bring these factors into a dialogue by analyzing the anti-abortion discourses that are shaped by CPC organizations and the white U.S. mainstream.

#### **LOCUS OF STUDY**

The research question centers around the racialized representations embedded in CPC advertising and promotional materials, particularly those produced and distributed by organizations that exist only to affect public discourse rather than to provide health care or reproductive services. Because of the broad scope and reach of their influence, I chose the following four organizations as my primary sources of advertising materials: Vitae Foundation and Heroic Media, due to their focus on media outreach and their international presence; TooManyAborted.com because of its explicitly racialized mission; and Care Net, a sprawling CPC umbrella organization.

Vitae Foundation is an organization whose mission is “to encourage a culture of life through mass communications” with the ultimate goal of reducing the number of

abortions performed on an international level.<sup>3</sup> Whether the legal designation is accurate, it self-describes as non-profit and educational, dedicated to “using research-based messaging to educate the public about the value and sanctity of human life.”<sup>4</sup> Its web text emphasizes that anti-abortion beliefs are fundamental to American culture and highlights the international reach of their media campaigns.

Similarly to Vitae Foundation, Heroic Media provides advertisements and other media to CPCs. According to its mission, Heroic Media is “an international faith-based non-profit that utilizes media to connect women with hopeful alternatives to abortion and build a culture of Life.”<sup>5</sup> It uses a variety of media tactics including television, billboards, and print materials to promote anti-abortion discourses throughout the public sphere.

TooManyAborted.com (hereafter TMA) is a website and media organization that uses media outreach to support and reproduce the rhetoric of black abortion as genocide. Although its mission promises connection to local resources, the primary aim of its advertising is to control public discourses around the value of black women’s pregnancies and what abortion means to black communities.

Finally, Care Net is an umbrella group in both scope and organizational function, reporting that their “network of more than 1,100 pregnancy centers offer [*sic*] hope to women facing unplanned pregnancies by providing practical help and emotional support” to women across Canada and the United States.<sup>6</sup> These four organizations represent some of the most influential and wide-reaching actors that create and distribute public

---

<sup>3</sup> "Mission." Vitae Foundation. Accessed February 25, 2012. <http://vitaefoundation.org/mission>.

<sup>4</sup> "About." Vitae Foundation. Accessed February 25, 2012. <http://vitaefoundation.org/about>.

<sup>5</sup> "About Us - FAQ." Heroic Media. Accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.heroicmedia.org/about-us/faq>.

<sup>6</sup> "Care Net | About Us." Care Net.

messages about abortion, and that impact real reproductive health and access by connecting people in crisis with fraudulent CPCs.

### **Crisis pregnancy centers**

The public fight over representations of deviant pregnancy is a particularly loaded battlefield of political discourses, which is part of why crisis pregnancy centers are such beloved and contested spaces on opposite ends of the political spectrum. In order to situate the medical and ethical stances of CPCs, I reference a 2006 report prepared for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform. Titled “False and Misleading Health Information Provided by Federally Funded Pregnancy Resource Centers,” this report investigated CPCs affiliated with national umbrella organizations (1). A researcher posed as a young woman to see what information would be provided to her, and ultimately 87% —20 of the 23 centers – offered misleading or false information (7). The most common themes of misinformation revolved around abortion's relationship to breast cancer, infertility, and mental illness (7). These issues are all emotionally loaded and presumably influence the likelihood of an uninformed caller taking the authority-provided statistics and anecdotes seriously, even if that information is patently fallacious. Thirteen of the CPCs contacted told callers that abortion directly led to “a wide range of damaging and longlasting [sic] psychological impacts” despite all scientific evidence to the contrary (12). The study concludes that this kind of gross exaggeration of frightening consequences is effective in discouraging abortion in pregnant teenagers and women (14).

Government and independent agencies have studied the missions, materials, and policies of crisis pregnancy centers, especially in light of the federal funding they receive. The federal government has produced required abortion counseling materials for use in several states, the contents of which mirror the information purported by most CPCs, and the Guttmacher Institute studied these materials. This institute is ranked as the number-one women's reproductive health, rights, and justice nonprofit by 192 experts and has contributed heavily to the literature on CPCs: its mission is to relate "state to national and international developments and highlights all aspects of sexual and reproductive health policy."<sup>7</sup> In their study of state-developed abortion counseling materials for use by CPCs, they report that "[i]n some cases, the state goes so far as to include information that is patently inaccurate or incomplete," supporting the charge that states requiring counseling is often meant to "discourage them from seeking abortions altogether" (Richardson and Nash 2006, 6). Information on abortion's relationship to breast cancer, psychological illness, referrals, and the experience of the fetus in these materials "is either misleading or altogether incorrect" (7). In conjunction with the study from the House of Representatives, it is clear that both CPC telephone staff and informative materials are grossly misleading and insulting to women who come to them for help in a situation of crisis.

#### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

My methodological approach to this project uses feminist critical discourse analysis (hereafter FCDA) as both a research method and a philosophical standpoint. In

---

<sup>7</sup> "Guttmacher Institute Periodicals." Guttmacher Institute. Accessed March 9, 2010. <http://www.guttmacher.org/journals/aboutper.html>.

order to conduct this study through this praxis-oriented research program (Lazar 2005), I first identify the marketing materials that each organization advertises on its website. Then I discuss the text and visual rhetoric of each poster or billboard, connecting its messages to popular cultural and political U.S. discourses. I read image text according to vocabulary, type of statement (such as imperative or declarative), and what may be its underlying implications. In analysis I pay special attention to the subject of each image, including: its facial expression, its styling, the direction of its gaze, and the surrounding colors and filters that contribute to its mood or aesthetic.

The critical and feminist components of FCDA are vital to this project. Michelle Lazar (2005, 2006) theorized FCDA as a praxis-oriented perspective, rather than a discipline, which is explicitly political and is "concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse" (Lazar 2005, 2, 5). I do not pretend to be neutral in this work, and I subscribe to the FCDA perspective that the ideology of gender is both hegemonic and oppressive (7-9). Accordingly, I approach this ideology on a social institutional level and focus my analyses on structures and institutions larger than the individual advertisements and organizations in question. My goal is to use anti-abortion rhetoric as a lens to discuss current discourses around race and pregnancy in the U.S. popular imaginary, and my hope is that this lens helps illuminate patterns in the politics of race and reproductive justice.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A critical methodological perspective requires a critical framework, and this study is informed by a theoretical frame that incorporates third-wave feminisms, critical race

theory, and Foucauldian conceptions of discourse and bodies. The third-wave feminist framework takes an interdisciplinary, post-structuralist approach to gender and sexuality while incorporating queer, transgender, and women of color critiques of the exclusionary politics and theory of the second wave. Women of color theory and black feminist thought contribute critical race theory to this social justice standpoint on gender. I situate this study using the critical race theory established by foundational black feminist scholars including Angela Davis (1983), bell hooks (1992), Dorothy Roberts (1997), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000). Their analyses of white privilege and supremacy in U.S. dominant culture and social institutions, as well as their formulations of reproductive justice,<sup>8</sup> form my frame for calling out CPCs' anti-abortion practices and discourses.

I identify and discuss these discourses according to Michel Foucault's theories of discursive formulation, which Stuart Hall (2007) explains for a general audience. I am investigating the wider cultural significance of representations of race in anti-abortion rhetoric, and that meaning depends on discourses, the larger units of analysis like narratives and groups of images (42) that take general knowledge about a topic and synthesize it to produce cultural meaning (43). Discourses produce meaning this way by taking statements about any topic, like abortion, and considering the following components: the rules that dictate how it is talked about, what subjects personify its discourses, who or what has authority on it, and how it is dealt with institutionally (45-46). Finally, studying discourses means acknowledging that discursive formations are

---

<sup>8</sup> While reproductive rights and the reproductive rights movement focus almost exclusively on access to abortion, reproductive justice activists acknowledge the institutional barriers to all stages of reproduction for marginalized populations, including the rights to fertility and safe, respectful childbirth.



always in development, and that new formations of a topic will eventually take over and regulate its social practices in new ways (46). I am particularly interested in this kind of shift, especially how developing political atmospheres in the U.S. align with current discourses within anti-abortion rhetoric.

Because these political atmospheres feature significant strains of white U.S. nationalism and hostility toward underrepresented racial and ethnic communities, it is important to mention also how Hall (2005) situates discourses within the dichotomy of the 'Western' mainstream versus the non-white and -Western Other. A discourse is "a particular way of *representing* 'the West', 'the Rest' and the relations between them" (291; emphasis in the original), Hall says, and I approach anti-abortion discourses along these same lines of power and oppression. Discourses have a fundamental relationship with how power circulates and is contested through social practices; as I emphasize in the following chapters, the discourses in question have real consequences and effects (295).

Anti-abortion discourses affect policy and common perceptions of marginalized bodies and reproductive futures, and the visual rhetoric of those discourses represent gendered and racialized bodies in reductive ways. Given these factors, Foucault's (1979, 136) theory of the docile body as an "object and target of power" is particularly salient. As he formulates, a "body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" by broad social disciplinary methods that both control and subjugate those bodies (137). This discipline produces docile bodies while increasing their economic utility and political obedience (138). This economic value of disciplined, docile subjects means that the most successful neoliberal subjects are also docile bodies.

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

The next three chapters engage with anti-abortion advertising, racial stereotypes, and social policy to build the argument that CPC discourses reflect growing neoliberalism, xenophobia, and bodily control in U.S. cultural politics. Chapter One discusses crisis pregnancy center tactics, materials, and targeted populations, and then situates this project in current social politics. In Chapter Two I investigate tropes of Latina sexuality and reproduction in Vitae Foundation advertisements, reading them alongside U.S. xenophobia and border politics with the work of cultural theorists Leo Chavez (2008), Arlene Dávila (2001), and others. The final chapter discusses the U.S. medical establishment's shameful history of denying black women reproductive health, and ties this history to the popular cultural value of black women's pregnancies. I call out Heroic Media, TooManyAborted.com, and Care Net for promoting neoliberal anti-abortion discourses that devalue black women and target their communities. In closing, I outline limitations, discuss future research potential, and reiterate how anti-abortion discourse may be the canary in the coal mine of U.S. cultural politics.

## **Chapter One: Crisis pregnancy center discourses and self-representation in the public sphere**

On this large university campus, students walking down a main street near the Texas state capitol are confronted daily with the question: are they “Pregnant? Scared?” The presence of a crisis pregnancy center is unavoidable in that public sphere and, depending on location and urbanity, in many others across the country. Daily encounters with a large placard like this one may inure viewers to the problematic discourses in anti-abortion messages and keep them from asking important questions, such as who controls these messages about pregnancy and abortion, how and where those actors distribute their messages, and what populations the advertisements target.

In this chapter I include sections on each of these questions. First I describe the organizations that have the most access to and control over the circulation of CPC discourses through visual rhetoric, including the roles of smaller independent centers and those of international and umbrella organizations that spread their messages on a larger scale. Types of audience interaction with this media is my next concern, and I detail the differences in reception between CPC presence on the Internet, print-based publication materials, and both large- and small-scale advertisements in public space. The type of media often depends on the target population, and I detail the populations CPCs aim to reach, in what ways, and why those populations are of such concern to anti-abortion actors. Pregnant people in positions of crisis are the direct targets of CPC messages, especially women of color and who are poor or young. Larger groups are targeted indirectly, including everyone in poor communities, communities of color, and people

who could become pregnant. Identifying the relationship between these factors and public discourses around pregnancy is instrumental to determining the scope and effects of those discourses.

CPCs have been established local and national organizations for decades<sup>9</sup> and a pressing concern to this research is how their rhetoric aligns with the current political situation in the United States. In the final section of this chapter, I report on the cultural patterns in U.S. popular culture and media that intersect with the issues of representation in CPC advertising, including racism, xenophobia, and a neoliberal sensibility. Each of the factors in this chapter contributes to the rich and problematic public messages around pregnancy, its termination, and the agencies who purport to offer services to people in reproductive crisis.

#### **CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS AND MESSAGE CONTROL**

The entity with the most financial and political influence over any partisan message is an important factor in understanding the larger system in which that message is at play. In the case of rhetoric around pregnancy services, national and umbrella organizations have significant control over the messages that the everyday consumer encounters. Individual centers and independent organizations only impact their local communities. These centers might advertise outside their offices, in phone books, and on local bus lines or community bulletin boards. Both the distribution and content of their materials is based on the immediate environment. Rather than offering only referral or

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert Pearson established the first "Pregnancy Problem Center" in Hawaii in 1970. "About Us." Pregnancy Problem Center. Accessed March 23, 2012. <http://pregnancyproblemcenter.org/AboutUs.aspx>.

Internet-based services, independent organizations are often walk-in or appointment-based centers for interested patients. Their advertising aims to encourage women to visit for services, counseling, or referrals, rather than to explicitly manipulate public sentiment around what unplanned pregnancy means to women and broader society.

In contrast, national-level crisis pregnancy services organizations, as well as umbrella organizations that represent and refer customers to up to thousands of centers and hot lines, have a more explicit role in affecting public discourses around pregnancy and abortion. Larger organizations have more resources and a higher public profile. They can allocate resources to professional graphic and web designers, manage more staff and contact lists, and receive more public funding than independent centers.<sup>10</sup> They have greater capacity for conducting and directing research on best locations and strategies for advertising, while large-scale campaigns and media are viable options for their messages, including methods such as mass mailings, mass protests, and highly visible media like billboards and television advertisements. Because of the scope of their advertising options, wider-reaching organizations can fine-tune the type of engagement they have with the public and the level at which they engage their target audiences.

The anti-abortion message is so important to crisis pregnancy centers individually and as a movement that several prominent national- and international-level CPC organizations only function to produce media promoting their finely-tuned discourses. They do not have physical centers for women to ostensibly receive services; rather, their media may contain contact information for a website or a separate hot line organization

---

<sup>10</sup> funding comparison

that refers inquirers to local centers. Organizations like Heroic Media, Vitae Foundation, and TooManyAborted.com explicitly state their missions to use media to the advantage of their anti-abortion messages. Given the focus of these groups on issues awareness and publicity, interrogating their roles and the content of their messages is central to determining how and why anti-abortion discourses travel through the public sphere.

#### **ENCOUNTERING THE DISCOURSES: MATERIALS AND PUBLIC SPACE**

Audience reception is a primary concern of centers that advertise effectively. Target audiences often encounter messages from crisis pregnancy centers on the Internet, in print form, and in public space. The form of media, and the arenas in which people interact with those media, helps address questions of who CPCs target and what messages they promote to each audience.

The Internet is a low-cost and relatively accessible medium for even low-budget operations to reach (some of) their target audiences. Every organization I included in this research has a highly-developed web presence through a comprehensive website. Several centers also invest in advertising their websites or their services through ad placements on other pages. Banner and bar ads typically work one of two ways: the advertiser strategically purchases space on relevant outside websites, or the advertiser participates in an automated system wherein the system determines which advertisements are relevant to which outside websites, or which viewers, and fill in an appropriate ad based on the viewer's browsing history or the site content.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that many CPC

---

<sup>11</sup> In a more extreme example, in September 2011 Heroic Media manipulated Google's keyword-based ranking system by buying ads and loading them with abortion-related keywords, directing users to an anti-abortion hot line owned by a CPC umbrella organization.

organizations have investments in other hotline or referral services, and it is economical for those organizations to advertise for one service on the page of another, while all owned, funded, or run by the same central group.<sup>12</sup> This practice saves money and can imply to users that the number of individual organizations doing similar work is higher, perhaps contributing to a sense that the anti-abortion movement and messages are widespread and more socially acceptable than the viewer would assume given full information about the overlapping investments of the organizations advertised.

CPCs also disperse information through print materials like brochures, pamphlets, and fact sheets. Some organizations offer their publications for individual or bulk purchase, which can include materials for classroom or office use like small posters or placards; however, the primary purpose of CPC print materials is to inform an audience that staff or services can reach in person. The audience usually receives print materials through either willing access or forced access. A willing reader picks up a brochure from a resource table, takes a flier from a bulletin board, or otherwise sees a resource and makes the decision to engage with it. In forced situations, people thrust materials at unwilling audiences. This can happen in public when people stand in high-traffic areas to spread their messages through high-volume flier distribution. Forced access is especially problematic during a crisis, such as when someone is trying to access a health services provider and anti-abortion protesters push their propaganda. Different organizations take

---

Resnick, Sofia. "Heroic Media using Google to Divert Abortion-Seekers, Violating the Search Engine's Policy." The Washington Independent. September 29, 2011. Accessed March 23, 2012. <http://washingtonindependent.com/112551/heroic-media-using-google-to-divert-abortion-seekers-violating-the-search-engines-policy>.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Care Net and Heartbeat International run Option Line. Mujella Cares owns Heroic Media, whose ads link to Option Line. The Radiance Foundation runs TooManyAborted.com. Cursory browsing through all six operations' websites generally reveals little about these relationships.

different tactics: local groups may engage in materials distribution in person, while larger and wider-reaching umbrella organizations make the most of their resources by taking up more public space.

Advertising in public space leaves the general public with very little choice whether to view or consume those messages. When CPCs take up public space to manipulate public attitudes about abortion and unplanned pregnancy, they assert ownership over that space and reach an extensive audience. This makes the implicit statements that they have the resources to take up that space and that their messages have enough institutional appeal to be approved for public space. Some campaigns of this nature use small placards and posters but post them on a large scale; for example, public transportation often approves posters to line passenger space. Buildings on college campuses and in other high-traffic centers may have wall panels for local business advertising or digital screens that display a rotation of ads. Saturating public spaces where there is no other option but to be there-- when using the only bus system in a city, for example-- is a particularly insidious mode of establishing or contributing to public discourse on a divisive issue.

CPCs with more resources are likely to make use of larger-scale displays of their messages in public space. Billboards are the most notable large-scale advertisements in public abortion rhetoric; they are divisive and in some areas a prevalent part of the landscape. Depending on state regulations, billboards can line highways and neighborhoods with advertising for government programs and private businesses. There is a history of the tobacco and alcohol industries using billboard advertising in specific



environments, notably urban spaces, to target poor and minority communities,<sup>13</sup> and because of the prominence of race and class issues in U.S. reproductive politics, CPC organizations have been able to use the same tactics to specifically target poor neighborhoods and communities of color with billboards that tie racial and ethnic identities to particular reproductive choices.

### **INTENDED AUDIENCES AND DIRECT TARGETS**

Crisis pregnancy centers maximize their advertising efforts through targeting specific demographics and communities. Their choices of who to target and how are not only publicly visible but immediately identify the political positions of those organizations. Whether or not the sponsoring CPCs intend their targeting methods to explicitly contribute to the discourse around reproductive choices, advertisements which either represent only one population-- or are only placed in one type of neighborhood-- make an emphatic statement about whose pregnancies are at risk and whose reproductive choices require outside control.

### **Targeting particular women**

Like the advertising of any business, CPC materials are meant to reach the consumers most likely to use its services: women in a position of crisis regarding pregnancy. Although there is a popular conception that this prototypical patient is

---

<sup>13</sup> Some examples of this research include:

Hackbarth, D.P. et al. 2001. "Collaborative Research and Action to Control the Geographic Placement of Outdoor Advertising of Alcohol and Tobacco Products in Chicago." *Public Health* 116 (6): 558-567.  
Kwate, Naa Oyo A., Meghan Jernigan, and Tammy Lee. 2007. "Prevalence, Proximity and Predictors of Alcohol Ads in Central Harlem." *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 42 (6): 635-640.  
Luke, Douglas, Emily Esmundo, and Yael Bloom. 2000. "Smoke Signs: Patterns of Tobacco Billboard Advertising in a Metropolitan Region." *Tobacco Control* 9: 16-23.

pregnant with nowhere else to turn, there are two types of ‘crisis’ the target woman may be experiencing regardless of her racial or ethnic identity, socioeconomic class, or age. The first is a crisis of information: the user may not have other sources of information about reproductive health and the services that may be available to her. Additionally, she may not have the resources to determine whether a particular center offers services she wants or needs, or whether it bases its services on a tradition with which she agrees. The second crisis is a crisis of time: a patient may need time-sensitive services, like prenatal care or advice about a particular physical symptom related to pregnancy. She may be considering abortion, and state legislation enforces deadlines for elective abortion according to the week, trimester, or ‘viability’ status of the pregnancy.<sup>14</sup> Any kind of deadline or time stressor heightens the crisis. CPCs understand and take advantage of the ways in which their patients can be vulnerable to crises of time and information.

When resources permit, larger organizations may conduct or order research on appealing to these target audiences. For example, Vitae Foundation commissioned the Right Brain People, an independent company of “pioneers in emotional research,” to conduct a study developing a communication strategy for best reaching women with their anti-abortion message.<sup>15</sup> The result was published in *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* in 1998 and describes the theory behind strategies of CPC advertising, providing Vitae Foundation and other organizations with effective targeting

---

<sup>14</sup> See comprehensive charts of all abortion restrictions by state through the Guttmacher Institute. "An Overview of Abortion Laws." Guttmacher Institute State Policies in Brief. March 21, 2012. Accessed March 25, 2012. [http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib\\_OAL.pdf](http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib_OAL.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> "Who We Are." Right Brain People. Accessed March 20, 2012. <http://www.rightbrainpeople.com/?p=about>.

"Our Research." Vitae Foundation. Accessed March 20, 2012. <http://www.vitaefoundation.org/our-research>.

methods. It has been cited in published works fifteen times between 2001 and 2011, indicating that it may still affect current campaigns. The article describes how, originally, the Right Brain People conducted left- and right-brain personality psychology testing to determine women's states of mind when considering abortion. The conclusions were published elsewhere, and this project puts them into practical context. For example, a majority of the promotional materials I found in this study depict only women, a strategy Swope (1998) identified to appeal to women more than pictures of babies because women are more comfortable seeing figures like themselves who have succeeded despite setbacks.

Anti-abortion organizations work from advertising custom-developed for best effectiveness. The most egregious CPC advertisements and strategies, however, target particular demographics: women of color, those without significant financial resources, and younger women. While the following sections detail factors specific to each group, these populations share the common status of having pregnancies devalued in common public discourses.

Women of color are heavily stereotyped and policed by white mainstream discourses of pregnancy and reproduction, while U.S. systems of power like institutions of education, law, and medicine underserve and malign their communities. As I discuss in detail in Chapter Three, the United States medical establishment has a massive history of oppressive behavior toward women of color, particularly regarding reproductive care. The public imaginary, as represented through popular culture and advertising, also heavily weighs race and ethnicity in its value judgments of reproduction. Women of color

are the subjects of reductive and damaging stereotypes widespread throughout media culture, including in CPC advertisements where they are even more explicitly problematic given the ties between pregnancy and sexuality. U.S. popular discourses have a particularly fraught history of devaluing the sexual expression of Latinas and black women, and later chapters detail how particular anti-abortion initiatives and targeting strategies continue that history through unjust targeting and stereotypes of these communities of color.

Crisis pregnancy centers also have particular advantages over low income women. Some poor women may not have the financial resources for birth control and other preventative reproductive health care, and they may not have access to practical resources for obtaining that care, such as transportation, accessible clinics, child care, or time off work to attend appointments. This lack of access can lead to higher rates of unplanned pregnancy and means those women may not have previously-established relationships with gynecologists or physicians who could offer the care CPCs purport to provide. Poor and working-class women are less likely than middle-class women to have health insurance, especially health insurance that covers reproductive care, and so walk-in appointments, especially those without the costs associated with true medical services, can be particularly appealing. CPC claims to offer free exams, ultrasounds, pregnancy testing, and baby supplies are also coercive to poor women who may not feel that they have true alternatives.

In addition to individual factors like lack of funds or lack of preexisting health care providers, systemic disadvantages impact poor women's vulnerability to CPC tactics.

Women who have grown up in poor neighborhoods are likely to have attended schools without adequate funding, which often means those schools were also unable to provide comprehensive reproductive and sex education. Quality of education can also impact whether a person has the tools to determine whether a particular service provider is legitimate; because CPCs almost always claim medical authority, poor women may be inclined to believe those claims and assume CPC services are valuable and that the claims their workers make are accurate. With less experience in medical offices or with a variety of health care providers, recognizing the signs that CPCs are manipulative and misleading about their services can be difficult, especially given the highly strategic tactics CPCs take to influence their patrons.

Young women, especially adolescents who have not finished junior high or high school, can face some of the same challenges as poor adult women whose educations were insufficient. In addition to these worries, the schools and entry-level jobs young people are likely to attend may not have strong support systems for the different options for addressing an unplanned pregnancy. These social structures do not offer health benefits or allow significant time away from school or work, and they are unlikely to have child care available. Young women often cannot manage or justify leaving work or school due to an unplanned pregnancy. Just as their educational and professional systems lack institutional support for pregnancies, young people's personal support systems may present additional challenges. Youth are often dependent on their families for shelter, finances, and other resources, and especially given (some) cultural values against pregnancy out of wedlock, those families and friend networks may not offer adequate

support to a young person trying to make a decision about an unplanned pregnancy. Because of the risk of angering and disappointing parents, being kicked out of a family home, or cut off from resources, youth are likely to be more resistant to seeking health care through their existing family care provider or other insurance-based care that would leave a trail of records for parents or other family members to uncover. CPCs offer a space outside of those standard offices and systems that can be attractive to young women in crisis.

Youth can also indicate a smaller chance of the woman in question having had a previous pregnancy or pregnancy experiences. Without this history, women may find it more difficult to make decisions about parenthood, adoption, or abortion, and may find it harder to imagine what those choices could mean for their particular circumstances. This means that not only do they have fewer tools with which to evaluate the quality of their treatment at any health care facility, but they need particularly sensitive and careful guidance from the people to whom they do turn. Through their advertising, CPCs purport to offer comprehensive information and counseling services that appeal to those who feel they need special guidance through a pregnancy experience which is new or foreign to them.

### **Affecting broader communities**

Crisis pregnancy centers are primarily interested in women in crisis and secondarily in targeting women of color, poor women, and youth; however, broader communities are also affected by the statements and value judgments implicit in CPC advertising. This rhetoric affects everyone in poor communities and communities of color

by devaluing their sexual expression and reproduction. CPCs did not create the stereotypes they use that damage underserved populations; however, their advertising still propagates dangerous and destructive conceptions of what it means to society to be pregnant and poor, young, or brown. Stereotypical representations affect every member of these groups and are particularly hurtful to people who either have been pregnant, because of the value judgment of those pregnancies, or who can or may get pregnant at a later point. Anti-abortion discourses have strong influence over what pregnancy looks like in mass media culture, and depicting low-income, young, and non-white pregnancies as less valuable shames people in those communities who plan to have children. Representing these pregnancies as problems to be solved is dehumanizing, paternalistic, and may frighten those who are trying to protect themselves from pregnancy. CPC discourses depend on and help bolster the social construction of these pregnancies as problems rather than miracles, and they mark targeted women as needy, irresponsible, and requiring control rather than respect.

#### **NEOLIBERAL MEDIA CULTURE AND ANTI-ABORTION RHETORIC**

These anti-abortion discourses reflect and are engaged by the U.S. neoliberal political sensibility and the value neoliberalism places on individualism, personal responsibility, and economic productivity. As Wendy Brown (2003) describes, neoliberalism is a governmentality which gives the economy priority over social services. A governmentality is "a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social" (par. 2), and within neoliberalism, the market is what

organizes and regulates the state: the state openly responds to the needs of the market, and the state's legitimacy is based on the height and growth of its economy. Crucially, neoliberalism also extends this economic rationality to a subject's individual conduct. Brown (2003, par. 15) astutely explains the effect of this sensibility on a subject's social value:

In making the individual fully responsible for her/himself, neo-liberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it relieves the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences. In so doing, it also carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action, e.g., lack of skills, education, and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits. Correspondingly, a "mismanaged life" becomes a new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers.

Neoliberalism denies the power of social and institutional systems on the individual, framing every circumstance as the full responsibility of the subject. As I discuss in the following chapters, this framework is essential to how and why popular discourses around abortion and fiscal policy around reproductive health are so fraught with narratives of fault, punishment, and personal responsibility.

Media discourses in the United States reflect many neoliberal themes, and scholars Rosalind Gill (2007, 2011) and Christina Schraff (2011) analyze neoliberalism alongside gender in their formulations of postfeminist media culture. Postfeminism is a contested "sensibility in which notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the 'wrong' 'choices,'" all of which are notions also central to neoliberalism (Gill 2007, 163).



Both neoliberalism and postfeminism fixate on individualism to the neglect of social or political situations, and both ignore "any idea of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves" (Gill and Schraff 2011, 7). These overlaps are crucial to understanding current media culture, but one departure is in how gender is theorized: with the understanding that the ideal disciplinary subject of postfeminism is feminine, Gill and Schraff (7; emphasis in the original) make a vital connection between neoliberalism and gender:

[I]n the popular cultural discourses examined in this volume it is *women* who are called on to self-manage, to self-discipline. To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen. Could it be that neoliberalism *is already gendered*, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects?

The anti-abortion discourses in this project reflect both media-supported, postfeminist expectations for female behavior and a neoliberal political rationality. Because women are the disciplinary subjects of the advertisements and discourses in question, Gill and Schraff's formulation of the overlaps is vital to building a comprehensive picture of U.S. political and social discourses around pregnancy and abortion.

### **Situating the field: Work on anti-abortion rhetoric**

The scholars I discuss above have addressed crisis pregnancy center statistics, race and representation, political and media sensibilities, and bodies as disciplinary subjects, and this study contributes to existing work on anti-abortion discourses by incorporating the necessary and fruitful theory from each of those fields. Existing research on anti-abortion media culture has taken alternate approaches: either

investigating the rhetoric of an organized movement, or analyzing specific visual rhetoric like fetal imagery in anti-abortion advertising.

The first work that articulates public discourse around reproductive issues is Celeste Michelle Condit's 1990 book, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change*. Condit builds her focus and argument on specifically public discourse around illegal abortion, using a set of texts meant to partially represent public discourse around abortion issues of the time, including materials from popular magazines supplemented by pamphlets, speeches, and newspaper articles. Condit identifies her approach as "rhetorical criticism, hermeneutics, semiotics, or discourse analysis" used in a modified way to look at significant patterns in the way discourse around abortion shifted between 1960 and 1985 (14). Although the book is decades old, it still serves as the only major study on reproductive rights rhetoric in the public sphere. The existing book-length project on anti-abortion rhetoric is Mark Allan Steiner's 2006 book, *The Rhetoric of Operation Rescue: Projecting the Christian Pro-Life Message*, which offers a comprehensive analysis of the rhetoric of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, focusing on the tactics it used in the 1980s and 1990s to recruit conservative Christian evangelical and fundamentalist groups to their cause. While less relevant to the current project, Steiner's work illustrates the scope of the effects of anti-abortion discourses by engaging with different stakeholders than the rest of the scholarship.

Fetal imagery is another popular focus for scholars of rhetoric and public discourse. In Petchesky's (1987) foundational article on the fetal image in ultrasounds and abortion narratives, she investigates the question of how "medicotechnical" anti-

abortion rhetorical strategies, like showing the fetus, bridge the boundaries between media spectacle and clinical experience for pregnant women. From this work, she argues for a feminist ethic of reproductive freedom. Others have explored emotion discourse in campaigns that use fetal imagery (Hopkins, Zeedyk, and Raitt 2005), while Rholinger and Klein (2011) investigated the visual landscape of the U.S. abortion debates more generally, finding that media images across several kinds of public events are similar and part of one overarching discourse. In the following section and later chapters, I discuss this larger discourse in terms of CPC advertisements and connect both to U.S. racial politics.

#### **CURRENT POLITICS: RACE AND RESTRICTIONS**

Anti-abortion public discourse and shaming poor, young, and brown women for hoping to control their reproductive futures are not new phenomena to U.S. popular culture. Recent years, however, have shown a shift in modes of institutionalized xenophobia and neoliberal reproductive restrictions, a trend that indicates a need to re-evaluate the relationship between racialized anti-abortion discourses and broader political culture.

The prevalence of racial stereotypes in advertising from anti-abortion agencies is particularly salient in the 2010s political atmosphere that manages to be popularly lauded as 'post-racist' while public policy marginalizes people of color and public figures popularize racially loaded language. Since September 11, 2001, and especially since the 2008 election of President Obama, parts of mainstream U.S. culture have demonstrated reactionary anti-black attitudes as well as new waves of racism and xenophobia against

Muslims, people from the Middle East, and Latina/os. Public news and government figures have used racist and problematic language in reference to President Obama and Michelle Obama that reflects stereotypes of blackness. Anti-Muslim, -Arab, and -South Asian sentiment is especially prominent in increased harassment and attacks against Middle Eastern Americans and from 'birthers,' members of a movement that questions President Obama's citizenship and therefore Americanness.<sup>16</sup> The Tea Party movement and political party has ideological overlaps with the birthers and has been called out by scholars, pundits, and journalists as promoting a particularly racist mode of conservative libertarianism.<sup>17</sup> The Tea Party has been invested in anti-immigration sentiment, particularly regarding undocumented immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Population hysteria and defensive whiteness have also marked the past several years of public discourse and are reflected in the dramatic increase in state laws related to immigration. In the first half of 2011 alone, state legislators introduced 1,592 bills and resolutions relating to immigration, which was a 16% increase from 2010. Legislatures enacted 257 of those measures that especially addressed law enforcement, identification, and employment. Five states adopted laws similar to Arizona's extreme bill SB.1070, which requires law enforcement to attempt to determine immigration status of people involved in a lawful stop.<sup>18</sup> Anti-Hispanic fear and white U.S. nationalism, rather than

---

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of these phenomena and the stereotypes from which they are derived, see: Aziz, Sahar F. 2009. "Sticks and Stones, The Words That Hurt: Entrenched Stereotypes Eight Years after 9/11." *New York City Law Review* 13: 1-33.

<sup>17</sup> For one conversation on how the far-right Tea Party revitalized conservatism, see: Williamson, Vanessa, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin. 2011. "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism." *Perspectives on Politics* 9: 25-43.

<sup>18</sup> Segreto, Joy, April Carter, and Ann Morse. "2011 Immigration-Related Laws and Resolutions in the States (January-June)." National Conference of State Legislatures. September 19, 2011. Accessed March 25, 2012. <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/immig/state-immigration-laws-january-to-june->

economic concerns, must account for much of this legislation: the policies persist even though it has been documented to harm state economies by repelling undocumented residents and costing taxpayers millions of dollars in implementation.<sup>19</sup> White resistance to Latina/o immigrant communities, as I discuss here and in Chapter Two, appears in popular discourse, public policy, and in the visual rhetoric of the agencies that deny women full reproductive health care.

Women of color and their children are also disproportionately affected by the neoliberal sensibility that permeates policy around public assistance. This growing political attitude in the U.S. values personal responsibility, individualism, and a self-regulating subject whose social and economic worth is determined purely by her economic productivity. It ignores larger institutional structures and long-standing systems of oppression, situating the individual as solely responsible for her social situation. The neoliberal focus on strict economics is reflected in policy decisions that see subjects as either economically productive or drains on federal money. The Women, Infants, and Children food supplementary program, for example, endured budget cuts in June 2011 that would remove 300,000 to 750,000 low-income mothers and young children from its services, even in the midst of a weakened economy.<sup>20</sup> Many programs have been cut during the economic recession since 2008, but it is significant that WIC lost funding at

---

2011.aspx.

<sup>19</sup> "Bad for Business: How Anti-Immigration Legislation Drains Budgets and Damages States' Economies." American Immigration Council: Immigration Policy Center. March 26, 2012. Accessed April 1, 2012. <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/bad-business-how-anti-immigration-legislation-drains-budgets-and-damages-states%E2%80%99-economie>.

<sup>20</sup> "House of Representatives Acts to Cut Mothers and Young Children from WIC." National WIC Association press release. June 20, 2011. Accessed March 28, 2012. <http://www.nwica.org/?q=advocacy/epubs/d16/23>.

the same time that reproductive health care restrictions were proposed and enacted in dramatically record rates, statistically ensuring an increase in unplanned pregnancies.

By almost any measure, an extreme number of abortion restrictions were introduced and enacted in 2011, reflecting the sentiment that the neoliberal subject is personally responsible for her own plight and reinforcing narratives of patriarchal and state control over women's bodies. Legislators introduced more than 1,100 reproductive health-related provisions, up from 950 in 2010, and sixty-eight percent-- compared to twenty-six percent in 2010-- restricted abortion and abortion access. These ninety-two new abortion restrictions in 2011 almost tripled the previous record of thirty-four adopted in 2005. They included abortion bans, waiting periods, ultrasound requirements, prohibition of insurance coverage, health clinic regulation, and limiting abortion by medication; in addition, measures cut funding from family planning initiatives and implemented abstinence-only education.<sup>21</sup> The state is regulating reproductive bodies and limiting women's bodily autonomy while funding crisis pregnancy centers and enacting racist anti-immigration policy. All of these factors at at play in U.S. public discourse. Anti-abortion organizations use deceptive and racially charged rhetoric that draws women of color to their manipulative services while simultaneously shaping discourses that demonize targeted women and their communities. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, interrogating these discourses alongside current politics reveals how CPC

---

<sup>21</sup> "States Enact Record Number of Abortion Restrictions in 2011." Guttmacher Institute Media Center News in Context. January 5, 2012. Accessed March 28, 2012.  
<http://www.guttmacher.org/media/inthenews/2012/01/05/endofyear.html>.

advertising reflects and serves to perpetuate U.S. racism, paternalism, and neoliberal thought.

## Chapter Two: Latina sexualities and immigration panic

In contemporary American<sup>22</sup> political rhetoric, the term "immigration policy" barely veils attitudes of white hostility and defensive nationalism toward Hispanic<sup>23</sup> and particularly Mexican and Mexican American people. In this chapter I first describe the contested nature of Hispanic and Latina/o as population labels and how U.S. marketing constructs Latina/os as a target audience. I then detail the current political trends in white xenophobia against Latina/o communities and how it manifests in immigration panic regarding border politics, assimilation and 'real Americanness,' and population growth, working from Leo Chavez's (2008) conception of "The Latino Threat Narrative." Pregnancy and reproduction are tightly woven with stereotypes of Latina sexualities, and I discuss the vitriolic rhetoric around fertility and "'the Latina body' [as] a convenient fiction--a historically contingent, mass-produced combination of myth, desire, location, marketing, and political expedience" (Mendible 2007, 1). Three caricatures of Latina sexuality appear in anti-abortion marketing produced by Vitae Foundation which I discuss alongside the discourses that perpetuate each: the criminal and 'illegal' immigrant, the hypersexualized Latina, and the traditional and superstitious Latina. I conclude by reiterating how the gendered bodies reinforced by problematic crisis pregnancy center

---

<sup>22</sup> There is contention among some feminist theorists about the use of "America" and "American" in reference to the United States. In order to acknowledge concerns that this habit erases the identities and experiences of people in other parts of the Americas, I use "United States" unless I am intentionally referencing popular discourses that depend on the term "American."

<sup>23</sup> "Hispanic" is also a contended term, sometimes because of its adoption by the U.S. government for the 1980 census. I use it only when referring to political rhetoric that centers around that term. Otherwise I use Latina and Latina/o because Latino refers to people with ties to Latin America, and is sometimes seen as a term that originated within the community. It is often used instead of Hispanic by grassroots and heritage groups and other community-based initiatives.



representations have consequences for Latinas trying to access legitimate reproductive health care.

#### **LATINA/OS AS A CONSTRUCTED POPULATION AND MARKET**

Whether due to convenience, ignorance, or to make a political point, politicians and mass media often use the term Hispanic to refer to one or more of many discrete communities and racial and ethnic groups. Scholars agree that Hispanic, Latino, Latina/o, and Latinidad are highly contested terms (Dávila 2001, Mendible 2007, Valdivia 2007, Chavez 2008; for example). Neither Hispanic nor Latina/o is a racial category; however, race is constructed in the U.S. national imaginary as binary and legible on the body. Popular media uses particular markers like skin color, hair type, and modes of dress to racialize a subject under the assumption that a general audience will be able to 'tell' if a subject is Latina/o just by looking at them. Although the labels tied to specific popular images of racial identity, those same terms are ethnically vague; identities such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Xicana, or American are not important for the audience to identify in order to 'read' a subject as Latina/o. Individuals claim their own racial and ethnic identities, rejecting any one inclusive term, but U.S. popular discourse is expert at "lumping of all that is Latina/o into an undifferentiated, homogeneous pile" (Valdivia 2007, 144) whether visitor, immigrant, or born in the U.S. (Mendible 2007, 4; Chavez 2008, 41). The average white U.S. citizen is likely to be ignorant of the variety of cultures and identities within the communities they might label Hispanic, and thus likely feels no responsibility to attend to the experiences and needs of a third-generation Mexican American citizen as differentiated from those of an undocumented Puerto Rican woman

who has just immigrated. Although organizing around one vast Latina/o population is useful for demonstrations of power, like voting or demanding political attention, homogeneity is more often dismissive and can be dangerous: racializing individuals into one population only demonstrates dependence on labels that are constructed to stand in for perceived biological differences that indicate social worth (Chavez 2008, 24). Latina/os are second-class citizens in the United States, and while I discuss particular themes of Latina/o social worth later in this chapter, economic value is quite different than social capital. As some crisis pregnancy center advertisements illustrate, marketing to Latina/os as a unified group is growing as a United States past time.

The Latina/o umbrella is "implicated in a history of U.S. marketing and entertainment distortions" (Mendible 2007, 4), and that history is expanding as more and more agencies have begun targeting the Latina/o "phantom conglomerate" population, whether they call it multicultural, ethnic, or urban (Dávila 2001, 217). Whether Latina/os have other types of social capital, marketers are eager to capitalize on their economic worth by developing advertising strategies based on popular stereotypes of Latina/os and their needs and interests. In her important book on the marketing power and visibility of Latinos in the U.S., Arlene Dávila investigates how both white and Latina/o advertisers approach the Latina/o market, the role of U.S. nationalism in relationship to that market, and how language and culture play into the relationship between producers and consumers. She emphasizes how marketing to a specific ethnic or racial group "hence surfaces as a medium where different minority groups' positions within U.S. racial hierarchies are mirrored and engendered" (Dávila 2001, 232). Discourses of Latina/o

sexuality reflect the second-class social position of Latina/os: the white mainstream devalues their sexuality and, in marketing to the imagined Latina/o conglomerate, codes that sexuality as female and essentializes it as Other than normative, celebrated white sexual expression. Later in this chapter, I identify instances of this phenomenon and discuss it in relationship to the current political climate and particularly how its representations of women can affect real reproductive health care: they draw women of color into manipulative CPCs while devaluing their pregnancies in the eyes of the white U.S. mainstream that controls public policy around immigration, social services, and access to reproductive services.

#### **POLITICAL SITUATION: XENOPHOBIA AND BORDERS**

Although racism and interracial tension are simply facts of life in the United States, their particular subjects, topics, and targets can shift according to national events and the political landscape. In some ways, for example, the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001 mark an increase in defensive white nationalism at the same time as federal policies around borders and safety intensified.<sup>24</sup> Chavez (2008, 21) considers the public atmosphere in that era and states, "if there has been one constant in both pre- and post-9/11 public discourse on national security, it has been the alleged threat to the nation posed by Mexican and other Latin American immigration and the growing number of Americans of Mexican descent in the United States." This threat, especially as it relates

---

<sup>24</sup> Increasingly heinous border laws have been proposed in the past few years. For example, during the 2012 Presidential election cycle in October 2011, Republican candidate Herman Cain proposed building a lethally electrified, barbed-wire fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

to cultural assimilation, criminality of illegal border crossing, and population growth, is very visible in the white national imaginary and current political discourse.

Chavez's work is fundamental to many of the arguments and positions in this chapter. He identifies the discursive binaries between 'Americanness' and the foreigner, enemy, illegality, and so forth, and he argues how illegality is a historically constructed political notion that took hold in the 1970s (41, 25). Particularly salient to this project, one chapter of *The Latino Threat* details examples of the dehumanizing rhetoric around "fertility" and "reproductive capacities" from alarmist news reports and other media. He also established the notion of sexuality and Latinidad as a double threat, and notes how Latina behavior, tied to ideas of religion, are, often reductively coded as "irrational, illogical, chaotic, [and] subject to tradition and superstition," is foreign to the white mainstream and thus also interpreted as threatening (74). Each of these arguments contribute to this chapter's discussions of anti-Hispanic xenophobia in the U.S. and stereotypes of Latinidad in anti-abortion rhetoric.

Xenophobia is presently a force to be reckoned with in United States immigration policy: there is a fixation in the U.S. popular imaginary on what it means to be 'American' and it is unclear whether the defensive nationalist ideal would prefer immigrant populations to assimilate, by speaking English and adopting other cultural norms, or whether this infiltration of down-home 'Americanness' is more dangerous to white nationalism. Either way, popular discourse is highly invested in representing the 'us versus them' territoriality that is institutionalized in popular Othering buzz phrases like 'anchor baby' and referring to people as 'illegals' or 'aliens,' all of which illustrate the clear

distinction between white 'American' desirability and the brown Latina/o cultures which threaten it.

These binaries and divisions are not just theoretical or ideological but have been imposed on the very real Mexican-United States border. It looms over popular discourse and pundits, politicians, and defensive white U.S. citizens use it as a discursive space to separate their conceptions of authentic whiteness from criminal brownness. Mexican immigrants are associated with criminality through the problematic and increasingly virulent rhetoric of illegality and invasion. Invasion or infestation evokes animal imagery, or insects or other pests, and the association of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and other Latina/os with literal vermin is deeply destructive: Positioning the border as a semi-permeable fence or barrier and immigration as 'out of control' only contributes to long-standing discourses of non-white populations and communities as wild, untamed, primitive, and otherwise animalistic. Politicians have introduced bills to state legislation that propose building massive walls and electrified fences on the border, using language reminiscent of cages and paternalistic control over the threatening Other.

In conjunction with this garden-variety racist panic many arguments have revolved around another type of animalized issue: immigrants having access to and in fact using resources such as public schools, medical care, and general 'American' tax dollars. The (constructed) image of people using resources rather than being appropriately economically productive neoliberal subjects is highly threatening within the popular discourse that dependency on (any kind of) welfare is repulsively 'un-American.' Taking advantage of existing privileges in the United States, like public school access, is

particularly threatening to white hegemony when the people in question seem to be manipulating the system to acquire rights they did not 'earn.' most visibly, citizenship rights for people born on United States soil. Because they can have citizenship rights, children of immigrants are particularly threatening to defensive white America.

### **THE RHETORIC OF LATINA SEXUAL STEREOTYPES**

Because Latinas are both sexualized and racialized in this rhetoric, they "pose a double threat, sexual and racial, to the dominant popular culture and social and political order of a nation that continues to see itself in terms of a dominant white identity and a black minority" (Lopez 1991, in Valdivia 2007, 131). The dominant white mainstream has constructed tropes of Latina sexual expression "that inform U.S. popular culture. A complex history undergirds these imaginings, many of which still evoke familiar caricatures of 'Latinness'" (Mendible 2007, 3). These stereotypes persist and are so reductive as to be simultaneously threatening and easily caricatured, to the detriment of actual women and their communities.

Like social expectations for white femininity and women in general, stereotypes of Latina sexuality are constructed according to a virgin/whore dichotomy (Dávila 2001, 131; for example); however, representations of Latinas are particularly strongly fixated on the hypersexual. As Chavez (2008, 72) explains, "'Latina reproduction' as an object of a discourse produces a limited range of meanings, often focusing on their supposedly excessive reproduction, seemingly abundant or limitless fertility, and hypersexuality, all of which are seen as 'out of control' in relation to the supposed social norm." The trope of uncontrollability that dominates popular culture images of Latinas applies to temper,

volume of speech, and 'over the top' dress as well as sexuality (Dávila 2001, 131; for example). In the following sections I identify this "Latin spitfire" (131) stereotype in CPC advertising alongside two others: the Latina as 'illegal' and criminally threatening, and the Latina as traditional, spiritual, superstitious, and virginal. Each of these is salient in the United States, where "the Latina body has signed in for somatic differences (body type, coloring, facial features) and differences in culture, class, language, religion, and sexuality. Consistently, its sign value has been linked to ideological currents, economic conditions, and political expediency" (Mendible 2007, 7). These tropes are overtly politicized and hold exceptional political power when images of Latina sexualities are tied to physical agencies that deny women reproductive health.

#### **CASE STUDY: VITAE FOUNDATION ADVERTISEMENTS**

"Bringing Media to Life" is the motto of Vitae Foundation, an organization that does not purport to offer reproductive health services but rather works to produce print and video media for anti-abortion advertising campaigns. The "About" section of their website, [vitaefoundation.org](http://vitaefoundation.org), also reports that they provide research results on target audiences and offer advice on placing advertisements in an effort to "educate the public about the value and sanctity of human life; restoring this value as a core belief in the 'American' culture; and reducing the number of abortions."<sup>25</sup> They say nothing about providing needed care to women, nor do they emphasize helping connect women with other centers that might serve their reproductive health care needs. Instead, their website and media products repeatedly reference the goal of restoring "traditional values" to

---

<sup>25</sup> "About." Vitae Foundation. Accessed February 25, 2012. <http://vitaefoundation.org/about>.

United States culture and are clear that they want to "change the American culture and make abortion *unthinkable*"<sup>26</sup>. In effect, this organization works on national and international levels to shape anti-abortion discourse. Through their television, billboard, and print outlets, they try to control the cultural discourse around pregnancy and reproduction.

Vitae Foundation's focus on not just media, but highly visible and staunchly conservative media figures is made clear by the rotating photo banner on their main page.<sup>27</sup> It features high-resolution images of ten celebrities and public figures including politicians Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, and Alan Keyes, as well as popular conservative TV and radio hosts Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Cal Thomas, and Laura Ingraham. The pictures are captioned with their names, the media with which they are associated, and quotations from each person endorsing Vitae Foundation and its mission. These images are not part of an advertising campaign that Vitae distributes in other arenas, but they do represent the image of the organization and its work as overwhelmingly white, adult, and powerful.

The true media campaign material, which essentializes Latina sexuality according to old stereotypes of Latinidad, is linked from their "Ad Portfolio" page and is housed in a small archive titled "Print, Billboards and Transit Ads"<sup>28</sup> which includes eleven "samples of some of Vitae's ads" to be used as billboards, posters, or bus, subway, or

---

<sup>26</sup> "Mission." Vitae Foundation. Accessed February 25, 2012. <http://vitaefoundation.org/mission>. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>27</sup> "Vitae Foundation." Accessed February 20, 2012, <http://vitaefoundation.org/>. All formatting is from the original.

<sup>28</sup> "Ad Portfolios." Vitae Foundation. Accessed February 25, 2012. <http://vitaefoundation.org/ad-portfolio>.



metro placards. One features a graphic of a pregnancy test, and each of the other ten depicts one woman who is looking down or away from the camera. The tone of the pictures, expressions, and legible subject race are as follows: Two white women with neutral expressions, one in black and white and one in bright colors; three Latinas with negative expressions, one dark in tone and two with bright colors; and one black woman with a negative expression in dark lighting. Four of the ads (with three individual women: one is in two separate ads) feature women who are ambiguously racialized. It is possible that they may be read as white or Latina depending on factors like bilingual overlying text and the neighborhood or target market of the organization using those images. In the following sections, I discuss the tropes of essentialized Latina sexuality and reproduction in the explicitly Latina-coded images: each image corresponds to one of the following discourses: the 'illegal' and criminal immigrant; the hypersexualized, 'exotic' Latina; and the traditional and spiritual Latina. Vitae Foundation provides media to CPCs on a broad scale, and those organizations use these entrenched discourses to villainize Latina sexualities and shame women-- who are already under-served by U.S. health care systems-- into using their misleading 'health services.'

### **First trope: 'illegal' immigrant criminality**

The first image in the print advertising archive is titled "DC Bus Ad 1"<sup>29</sup> and is stylized in a way that reinforces the trope of Latina/o immigrant criminality (see Appendix, Illustration 1). The ad uses a slightly desaturated picture of a young woman

---

<sup>29</sup> "Print, Billboards, and Transit Ads." Vitae Foundation. Accessed February 26, 2012. <http://vitaefoundation.org/print-billboards-and-transit-ads>.

with long, dark, curly hair and light brown skin leaning against a chain-link fence in the dark, arms around her knees. She could also be read as ambiguously racialized, but several factors cue the observer to her 'race' for the purposes of the advertisement. Her skin is light but still Other, fulfilling "the stereotype of Latinas in U.S. popular culture-- nearly white, but brown enough to count as different" (Valdivia 2007, 138). Large text imposed over her body reads, "FREE Abortion Alternatives" and a bulleted list to the side lists three services, each "FREE". Smaller text lists four locations in the Washington, DC area and their phone numbers, one followed with "Se Habla Español." This Spanish text is also telling: although a similar notice might be very common in primarily- or highly-Latina/o communities, this advertisement ran in Washington, DC and, anticipating a Latina/o audience, points out specifically which office is accessible to Spanish speakers. The young woman looks Latina in a different way than the models in the other Vitae Foundation ads: her hair and facial structure could lead audiences to read her as Caribbean- or Afro-Latina, which is the significant Latina/o population in the D.C. area.

The various components of the image reflect current political discourses of Latina and Latina/o deviance, criminality, and poverty, and the threat these ideas pose in the imaginaries of white U.S. mainstream which results in both physical and ideological narratives of containment and control. The wire fence looks like some that surround parks and ball courts in cities, although nothing can be seen beyond the fence due to darkness. By sitting on a city sidewalk at night, the subject fits the stereotype of the girl who gets in trouble-- or creates trouble-- due to her disobedience, deviance, or lack of direction. Backgrounds like the fence are often used to connote urban spaces, and urbanity

combined with poverty is highly racialized in the national imaginary: the subject's position of sitting on the ground, alongside the emphasis on "FREE" services which appears in neither of the ads with white women, can be read as a picture of poverty. Working-class status is particularly disturbing to the white majority; as Valdivia (2007, 131) notes, "Latinas are also coded as posing a class threat to the middle-class-dominant national imaginary of the United States as threatening and inescapably working class." Her youth shows particular deviance, as she is a young woman who hangs out on the streets instead of either engaging in something safe and socially-sanctioned, or something neoliberally and economically valuable like working or shopping. She is literally not producing anything, reflecting the white 'American' defensiveness around earned (and thus deserved) resources and services. Like the 'black welfare mother' stereotype so common to political discourse (Roberts 1997; for example), this advertisement vilifies her implicit situation of pregnancy, and by including the physical barrier of the fence in the background, it may also tie her to narratives of white containment and control over Latina/o immigration and the volatile border between the U.S. and Mexico.

This advertisement marks the young woman as both Latina and criminal, tying her and her pregnancy to the toxic public discourse that devalues children of immigrants and Latina/o reproduction. This discourse, which reflects patriarchal narratives of white control over the Other, is not new: in the past thirty years, anti-immigration sentiment fixated specifically on "the biological and social reproductive capacities of Mexican immigrant and Mexican-origin (U.S.-born) women" (many people, in Chavez 2008, 71). This institutionalized hostility toward Latinas makes the development of negative visual

rhetoric and oppressive policy initiatives more palatable, such as recent proposals to change the U.S. Constitution to remove automatic birthright citizenship from 'anchor babies.'<sup>30</sup> Politicians and pundits are not discussing a perceived Latina/o population boom in vague or gender-neutral terms; rather, Latina reproduction has been a constant focus in political debates about demographic shifts in the U.S. Language that frames women's bodies as tools, like focusing on Latinas' "fertility," is standard in current media and public debates about immigration policy,<sup>31</sup> and even when it is couched in pseudo-scientific terms meant to come off as neutral, like dryly discussing "fertility rates," the speakers are making value judgments about Latinas' pregnancies and the attendant tropes of Latina sexualities.

### **Second trope: 'spicy' hypersexual fertility**

A second Vitae Foundation depiction of a Latina links hypersexuality and uncontrollable fertility to construct another kind of threat to U.S. nationalism. This image is the most common visual discourse around Latinas in the United States, representing entire populations of people with the caricature of the "overly sexualized, loud, and hot-tempered Latin spitfire that has dominated stereotypes of Latin women in mainstream media" (other folks in Dávila 2001, 131). The advertisement in question, used in the Los Angeles area, uses a photograph of a woman in close crop that reveals black clothing

---

<sup>30</sup> Republican Congressman Nathan Deal and ninety-five co-sponsors introduced HR 1868, the Birthright Citizenship Act of 2009, which would eliminate birthright citizenship born to undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (unless the undocumented parent(s) are serving in the U.S. military).

In another example, in January 2011, legislators from five states led a national campaign to "send a statement" by introducing legislation ending birthright citizenship in 14 states.

Preston, Julia. "State Lawmakers Outline Plans to End Birthright Citizenship, Drawing Outcry." January 5 2011. Accessed March 8 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/06/us/06immig.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/06/us/06immig.html?_r=1).

<sup>31</sup> MediaMatters.org reports that Fox News, CBS Radio, NBC News, and the New York Times all used the term "anchor babies" on air in 2011, to varying degrees of push back from the public.

straps across her bare chest and her shoulders (see Appendix, Illustration 2). Her hair is shiny and straight, swept back to show large gold hoop earrings, bangs falling across her heavily made-up face as she looks down, the light emphasizing her collarbones and full lips. Her shoulders are in shadow, a stark contrast to the bright pink and green background.

This woman's presentation as culturally specific and sexually available is the main focus of this advertisement and illustrates how different audiences may read the same image. Because this is an L.A.-based advertisement, the subject's long hair, large earrings, and full makeup could be a nod to the working-class Mexican American female identity, the *chola*. Cholas often have access to a particular kind of liminal masculinity or butchness through their clothing and assertive, sometimes aggressive affect, which contrasts with their heavy eye makeup and large hoop earrings. There is a queerness to cholas' presentation and to their separation from the traditional Latin@ family structure and its institutions. Cholas are also popularly associated with a degree of sexual queerness and non-normativity, and the disconnect between that queerness and an advertisement that shames pregnancy is at the forefront of this image. Through this image Vitae Foundation appropriates the chola subcultural presentation in order to violently *reinscribe heteronormativity* on the subject. The queer brown woman is pregnant, lost, ashamed, and at the mercy of organizations which deny her true health care and bodily autonomy. She is not allowed to be queer or subcultural in a way that challenges institutional power, the way the chola subjectivity does; instead, she is forced into a narrative of pregnancy without agency. And if the audience does not read her as a chola,

her styling nonetheless evokes some Latina notions of how women should dress, and that styling could be intentionally playing into subcultural cues, chola or not, that some Latinas will recognize.

An alternate reading of this image sees it as an explicit example of marking Latina femininity as bound "to bodily excess, sexuality, or indulgence" (Mendible 2007, 3) in the eyes of a white audience. The subject is presented as sexually present and emphatically feminine, much like the public media image of revered icons like Jennifer Lopez, except that the attention this woman draws is negative rather than celebrated. Her position of crisis and lack of a 'come-hither' expression indicates that her presentation receives or deserves punishment, or needs to be controlled (Valdivia 2007, 140): her excessive sexuality got her 'in trouble,' and because the neoliberal subject is fully individually responsible for her actions and their outcomes, this image tells the reader that she is only another 'spicy' Latina who could not control her sexuality. Attributing this kind of 'hotness' to all Latinas "objectifies and sexualizes them in a way that, once again, sets them up as society's Others, in distinct opposition to the normative sexuality and morality of white women" (Chavez 2008, 76). The eroticized Otherness of the 'hot Latina' trope is 'spicy' like the bright pink and green background of the advertisement, not desaturated and despondent, like the tone of the picture of the threatening Latina immigrant. In either case, Othering brown women clearly also devalues their pregnancies and reproductive choices.

The choices, or situations, that the advertisement text describes is also telling of the discourses through which dominant white society denigrates Latinas' pregnancies and

denies them, both ideologically and systemically, a full range of respectful reproductive care. The large texts on top reads, "Pregnant & Alone? There's Hope, There's Help!" with the tag line, "Free, Caring And Confidential Help For You." A similar set of captions reads "¿Estas embarazada y sola? ¡Existe ayuda!" with the tag line "¡Se ofrece ayuda gratuita y confidencial!" and the phone numbers that follow are in Los Angeles. The first text promises English speakers that "There's Hope" and that "Caring" help awaits them if they contact the phone numbers below. Because the contacts are crisis pregnancy centers, this is unlikely, but advertising to English speakers that they can feel a secure and optimistic hope, and that they deserve sympathetic attention, reflects the image and the services CPCs purport to offer. The Spanish language headline and tag line are presented as direct translations through identical typeface, font weight, and text color; however, the promises of hope and of caring help for the Spanish-speaking reader are emphatically absent. There is little excuse for these omissions, particularly in the tag line where there is ample space in the image for a longer phrase. Instead, there is a sense of urgency in the language, telling the reader that she needs help now, at this center where she can get it. There is no empathy or understanding for Latinas who find themselves in a position of reproductive crisis: they are subject to the inexcusable paradox of discourses that first essentialize Latinas as hypersexual and animalistic, unable to contain their fertility; and second, as fully and personally responsible for any crisis, regardless of oppressive social systems and lack of access, and who deserve what is coming to them.

### **Third trope: spirituality and superstition**

Although somewhat less visible in the discourses of Latina criminality and hypersexuality in white U.S. popular culture, there is a third stereotype of Latinas as spiritual and submissive in accordance with an imagined common Hispanic cultural tradition. The third Vitae Foundation advertisement that evokes Latinidad has elements of this trope. Similar to the previous ad, it has a bright pink, magenta, and bright green background with informative text and a photograph of a young woman (See Appendix, Illustration 3). The text on this iteration is all in Spanish except the very top line which reads "Los Angeles Pregnancy Services (LAPS)," the company to which Vitae Foundation outsourced this image. In conjunction with the Spanish language text, its Los Angeles market, and her not-white-enough skin, the woman in this image reads as Latina. She has pale skin, dark eyes, and long dark hair, and she is gazing up toward the top of the advertisement in partial profile with her chin on her hands. This image is subtler than the previous examples in its adherence to a single stereotype, but it still represents a reductive trend in Latina representation.

White U.S. society often assumes that Latina/o communities are highly religious and associate them either with an indigenous folk spirituality or Catholicism and its attendant traditions. "Irrational" or "illogical" traditional and superstitious behavior is threatening to the white mainstream, and within this cultural discourse, the young woman in this image can be categorized as the Latina driven by a spiritual tradition that majority culture dismisses. The image could look like she is merely in thought, but her gaze and the position of her hands are reminiscent of praying: her palms are not pressed together, but bringing her closed hands into a similar position evokes prayer, and she looks up and



out of the frame of the image. Her face is also lit from above in a way similar-- but just different enough-- from the common method of lighting from above and behind to denote piousness and purity in white women (Dyer 2007, 118, 119). She is looking up into the light but it is not shining behind her hair or framing her silhouette, which would complete an image of ideal white femininity (122-125). Instead she is spiritual in a different way, both threatening in its foreignness and familiar in its signs, perhaps using her clothing's long sleeves, pulled up over her wrists, to mark the 'traditional' of a white surrounding society that associates piousness with physical modesty. The advertisement is only for Spanish speakers and instructs them on what might be a redemptive model of spirituality, while it is simultaneously legible to a white audience that can tell this young woman is 'in trouble' only by reading her image and the name of the pregnancy center.

Perhaps because the mainstream conservative movement in the U.S. approves of (white, Protestant) religion, the stereotype of the spiritual Latina seems less destructive than the Latina as criminal or hypersexual. However, all stereotypes reduce people and populations to single-dimension entities and deny the value and authenticity of individuals' voices, needs, and experiences. When people in already-underserved populations seek urgent services, the impact of these problematic and instantly recognizable discourses shifts from ideological to physical harm.

## **DISCUSSION**

Making an explicit connection between discourses of Latinidad, the value placed on Latina reproduction, and the actual social and political situations of Latina/o communities in the U.S. is extremely important when calling out organizations that both

promote the stereotypes and worsen the social situations of U.S. Latinas. As Mendible (2007, 15) reports, "U.S. Latinas are overrepresented in high school dropout and teen pregnancy rates, while foreign-born Latinas account for a majority share of low-wage factory or domestic jobs. Statistically, U.S. Latinas remain second-class citizens." This is not unrelated to crisis pregnancy centers manipulating women into being denied legal health care services. As discussed in the previous chapter, CPCs particularly impact poor women, and when poor women are also read and racialized as Hispanic by white society, they suffer more than "[t]hose with the most economic capital [who] are also most likely to resist their incorporation, treatment, and regularization as minorities by distinguishing themselves from their racialized counterparts, those who, unlike them, do have visible 'culture'" (Dávila 2001, 233). Visibility and visual rhetoric is the primary medium through which popular culture determines and propagates ideas of who belongs to which 'culture(s)' and, as the advertisements in this chapter illustrate, those determinations are reductive and dehumanizing. I borrow from Mendible (2001, 1) to close this chapter and stress the importance of "the understanding that several forces converge in producing acculturated, gendered bodies and that these forces have very real consequences for Latinas in the United States and abroad." Whether those consequences are embodied in political language or women's reproductive futures, they require attention and contextualization within broader discourses of racism and state control.

### **Chapter Three: Blackness, dangerous sexuality, and urban initiatives**

Latinas and black women all face the stigma of U.S. society keeping surveillance over their reproduction, but black women pose a unique reproductive threat within the popular imaginary (Chavez 2008, 74). Discourses of animalistic and wild black sexuality, the black welfare mother, and economically irresponsible black childbearing are deeply ingrained in U.S. political rhetoric and justified with racist social histories. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 70) states, "[m]aintaining images of U.S. Black women as the Other provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression": anti-abortion groups and crisis pregnancy center organizations take advantage of these problematic discourses to continue mediating black women's reproductive freedoms and to demonize black motherhood. In this chapter I first survey the history of birth control and sterilization in black communities, and follow by analyzing the advertisements of three anti-abortion organizations: Heroic Media, TooManyAborted.com, and Care Net. These analyses reveal the objectives of these groups to include, respectively, promoting ideas of 'right' and 'wrong' motherhood, shaming black women, and targeting black urban communities with their efforts. Then I discuss current political rhetoric and how neoliberal economic policies implicate the black welfare mother and affect health care access. In conclusion I revisit black anti-racist activism and what organizations are doing now to counter this dangerous rhetoric and make reproductive health care accessible to everyone.

#### **BLACK WOMEN AND A HISTORY OF REPRODUCTIVE CONTROL**

Institutional health care and reproductive medicine in the U.S. has a long history of oppressing black communities, especially black women. This history gives vital context to both the crisis pregnancy centers that manipulate women of color, and the discourses of black pregnancy and motherhood that perpetuate damaging and dehumanizing imagery in the public sphere. In this section I look to the significant foundational scholarship that investigates the racism in systems that have regulated black women's sexuality and reproduction, and how black communities work for justice.

In the late 19th century, Americans began embracing the idea that intelligence and other character traits were genetically inherited, prompting a push toward government eugenics policies which were still in place and growing by 1920, when Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger led the birth control movement. Sanger's politics and policies are infamous for promoting racist population control; as Dorothy Roberts (1997, 58) describes in her foundational book, *Killing the Black Body*, Sanger's career demonstrates how "birth control can be used to achieve coercive reproductive policies as well as women's liberation." She commissioned a 1930s and 1940s eugenical sterilization initiative called the Negro Project and promoted reproduction suppression for those deemed 'unfit' by popular discourses of the time, including people of color. These facts make it difficult for many communities to trust Planned Parenthood and the U.S. medical establishment in general. As Angela Davis (1983, 215) elucidates in *Women, Race, and Class*, Sanger's policies and eugenics discourses robbed the birth control movement

of its progressive potential, by advocating for people of color not the individual right to *birth* control, but rather the racist strategy of *population* control. The birth control campaign would be called upon to serve in an essential capacity in the execution of the U.S. government's imperialist and racist population policy.

That policy, and particularly its involuntary sterilization efforts, was explicitly eugenicist in its efforts to regulate black women's childbearing (Davis 1983, Roberts 1997, Rousseau 2009). Government-sponsored family planning programs coerced black women into being sterilized beginning in 1907 to "control criminality, amorality[,] *incompetence, imbecility, and denigracy*," particularly in poor rural regions and urban inner cities (Rousseau 2009, 106, emphasis in the original). These efforts continued for several decades and peaked in the 1970s when these government-sponsored agencies, particularly hospitals, sterilized women and girls without their permission or knowledge (131; Roberts 1997, 56). Health services purported to offer reproductive information and health care while sometimes using community authority figures of black doctors and clergy to persuade women into sterilization (Rousseau 2009, 110). Some birth control methods also became tools of oppression: also in the 1970s, the long-term contraception shot Depo-Provera was tested on poor, illiterate, and black women and girls "in efforts to curb undesirable reproduction" (131).

It is important to recognize that although the effects of these policies were devastating, black women were not passive victims. Rather, they worked to separate the birth control they desired from the population control enacted by the U.S. government: black community leaders understood the importance of family planning, and black activists were enthusiastic about establishing local clinics and participating in the national

debates about birth control (Roberts 1997, 82). Collective organizing and response was vital to supporting the health of these communities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and similar efforts continue to push back against dangerous initiatives.

Earlier oppressive reproductive policies and black activist communities are still active today, when U.S. social systems have significant control over black women's reproductive options at the same time that the voices of women of color have demanded attention in the public sphere. Explicit local policies such as minor compensation for sterilization continue to be implemented across the U.S. that disproportionately affect women of color (Rousseau 2009, 107), while underlying economic oppression keeps black women from their ideal reproductive futures. Although black women want children at the same rate as white women, black women have a disproportionate thirty-seven percent of all U.S. abortions, mirroring their rate of unintended pregnancy (Cohen 2008, 2). As Angela Davis (1983, 204) explains, when black women "resort to abortions in such large numbers, the stories they tell are not so much about their desire to be free of their pregnancy, but rather about the miserable social conditions which dissuade them from bringing new lives into the world." The high abortion rate results mainly from disparate access to contraceptives and life events like relationship changes and moving that are more common among low-income and minority women (Cohen 2008, 3, 4). Additional efforts to curb black women's access to legitimate family planning and health care come from anti-abortion discourses that use the racist history of birth control; as Rousseau (2009, 108) reports, family planning is tainted by this history and "the debate continues today as to whether or not the organization's dedication to providing abortion;

contraceptive; and sterilization services is due to a commitment to reproductive rights or to negative eugenics” (Rousseau 2009, 108).

In response to the destructive discourses that anti-black abortion groups perpetuate, women of color activists continue to work for full financial and geographic access to reproductive health care services. Powerful institutions like the Black, Hispanic, and Asian Pacific American caucuses in Congress are overwhelmingly strong advocates for reproductive and abortion rights, as is a number of women of color organizations including African American Women Evolving, the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health and SisterSong, among others (Cohen 2008, 5). Their efforts are often connected directly to racist anti-abortion discourses: for example, SisterSong founded the Trust Black Women Partnership in 2010 “to ensure that black women can mobilize wherever such campaigns appear in African American communities, and to generate deeper discussions about black women's autonomy and human rights.”<sup>32</sup> Their advocacy is helping alter negative popular discourses around reproduction which guide destructive representations of women of color in the public sphere. Throughout the advertising examples I discuss in this chapter, I consider the powerful communities who are dedicated to anti-oppression work while acknowledging that women of color are still negotiating the ongoing effects of the shameful and detrimental histories of reproductive control.

#### **CASE STUDY: HEROIC MEDIA**

---

<sup>32</sup> Ross, Loretta. "Fighting Black Anti-Choice Campaigns: Trust Black Women." RH Reality Check: Reproductive & Sexual Health and Justice, News, Analysis, & Commentary." March 1, 2011. Accessed March 10, 2012. <http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/node/15635>.

The mission and outreach strategies of Heroic Media are explicit about how the organization hopes to control public discourses around abortion. Similarly to Vitae Foundation, Heroic Media does not offer reproductive health care or services, but provides advertisements and other media to crisis pregnancy centers: according to its mission, it is "an international faith-based non-profit that utilizes media to connect women with hopeful alternatives to abortion and build a culture of Life."<sup>33</sup> It was established under the name Majella Cares in April 2004 in Austin, Texas, and has since expanded to cover the continental U.S. and parts of Latin America. An extended version of its mission also states: "we use mass media to impact culture on the Life issue. We aim to change hearts and minds about abortion, using research-based television commercials, internet ads, billboards and other forms of pro-life media [ . . . ] We celebrate the heroism of motherhood."<sup>34</sup> Heroic Media's media research is explicit from its Media Strategy page, which describes the organization's two types of advertisements: the "Call for Help" ads meant to connect people with unplanned pregnancies to crisis pregnancy centers, and the "Attitude Change" ads formulated to shed light on statements and statistics about abortion which support Heroic Media's mission. It primarily targets women ages eighteen to thirty-four with these messages and monitors the response rates on all of its campaigns.<sup>35</sup> In this section I discuss the visual rhetoric of the billboard advertising campaigns that Heroic Media acknowledges on its website and then those that raised

---

<sup>33</sup> "About Us - FAQ." Heroic Media. Accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.heroicmedia.org/about-us/faq>.

<sup>34</sup> "About Us - Mission and Values." Heroic Media. Accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.heroicmedia.org/about-us/mission-values>.

<sup>35</sup> "Power of Media - Media Strategy." Heroic Media. Accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.heroicmedia.org/power-of-media/media-strategy>.



particular controversy in 2011 through their disrespect for black women and their communities.

### **Modes of black pregnancy in billboard images**

Because Heroic Media's primary goal is to use advertising to change the picture of abortion in the public imaginary, I focus the first part of this analysis on the billboard and transit advertisement images it includes in its online media portfolio. The portfolio states that Heroic Media strategically places its billboards to impact the most people facing unplanned pregnancies and uses the transit ads in urban markets. Both sets of example advertisements use the same images; therefore, I consider only the billboard images here because their dimensions allow the text to be placed alongside the featured photographs rather than across them. Of the five billboard images, one is an illustration of a pregnancy test stick and one features a white woman. Reflecting Heroic Media's outreach strategy, the remaining three billboards feature women of color. These three demonstrate three modes of approaching black pregnancy: shaming and devaluing unplanned black pregnancy, taking an approachable and neutral-appearing position to appeal to an audience, and moralizing through construction of a good or 'right' way to be a black mother.

The text and imagery of the first billboard reflects common anti-abortion discourses and offers implicit judgment of the pregnancies of women of color. It features a young woman's face: she has brown skin; straight, long black hair; and she is looking down out of the frame (see Appendix, Illustration 4). Her eyebrows in particular make her expression seem like one of concern, shame, or sadness. This model is a woman of color;

perhaps she is meant to be read as black, or perhaps as an Afro-Latina or Afro-Caribbean woman. Within the popular discourse, as a pregnant woman of color she is despondent and has nowhere to turn, or as the ad copy suggests, she is scared: the background of this image is dark gray and carries the headline, "Pregnant? Scared?" with text below stating "You're not alone" and "1-800-395-HELP." Neither this woman's pregnancy nor her full range of health care options are celebrated in Heroic Media's narrative. It presents a subject purportedly in need of help, but this billboard's audience cannot know what she really needs: she has no voice or agency in the image. A harsh light falls on half of her face where strands of hair cast dark shadows bisecting the light, and her left side is thrown into shadow. In conjunction with the rhetorical questions in the headline, this light feels like an interrogation, and the subject's closed eyes and mouth preclude her from answering. Heroic Media constructs answers for her, and the story they create is resonant with popular discourses of devalued black motherhood.

The two remaining billboards feature the same model but carry different messages: one is a relatively neutral offer of help, and the other depicts (this) black motherhood as happy and satisfying. The model is a young woman with brown skin and straightened shoulder-length black hair (see Appendix, Illustration 5). She is wearing gold hoop earrings and a light green cardigan, and she is photographed sitting indoors in front of a dark brown wooden staircase and molded railing. Her clothing and the setting connote affluence and perhaps conservatism: white mainstream audiences likely view her conservative hairstyle, muted makeup, and reserved expressions as positive and responsible motherhood, in contrast with stereotypes of 'loud' or 'flashy' black fashion

and hairstyles that popular culture often associates with urban and low-income black communities. Middle-class black people also respond less favorably to advertising that uses Afrocentrism or black slang (Morton 1997 in Dávila 2001, 233). Both 'successful' black communities and white society are likely to respect her pregnancy and her decisions about her reproductive futures. In the first billboard, she is looking directly into the camera with a neutral expression. The headline text reads, "**Un**planned pregnancy?" and offers free, confidential help (see Illustration 5, emphasis in the original). Neither the headline nor her expression indicates how she feels or what she will do about a pregnancy-- only the offer of help belies the discursive undercurrent that, as a black woman, she cannot manage or cannot be trusted to manage her reproductive futures without others' input, and, historically, white control.

The third advertisement is even more egregious. The same woman expresses her agency but only within a harsh binary of options that is constructed by popular discourses around abortion. Entitled "Ultimatum Billboard" on the website, this third billboard underscores the idea of one right way to be a black mother which is determined by one reproductive choice that has distinct and inalterable effects. The model is smiling at the camera with her chin slightly forward, indicating pride, and she is sitting with a smiling young child who has dark brown skin and black hair in an Afro hair style (see Appendix, Illustration 6). The largest text reads "I chose *life*," followed by "*unexpected* pregnancy[,] unexpected *happiness*."<sup>36</sup> Given this language alongside the subjects' appearance and expression, her choice was clearly the right way to be a black woman: in contrast with the

---

<sup>36</sup> I use italics here to indicate that those words are bolded and in larger text on the original image.

first billboard that silenced its subject, this one allows eye contact and a first-person testimonial of what decision either determined or illustrates her success. In this enviable woman's world, the alternative to choosing "*life*" (for a single, smiling, well-groomed child) is so unthinkable as to be absent from the text. The only reference to an alternate future is her "unexpected" happiness, but that joy denies any value to the future she was expecting; additionally, it denies any value to the people who do make an alternate decision. Constructing oppositional binaries necessitates objectification, as Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 70) states: "In binary thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled." Heroic Media's ultimatum functions on a binary in which a black woman chooses abortion and is Othered, incapable and undeserving of the joy and success of this billboard's subject, or she carries a pregnancy to term and is rewarded with conservative affluence and satisfaction.

### **Dangerous black women, controversy, and community response**

The most remarkable--and controversial--Heroic Media billboards explicitly position black motherhood as dangerous, devalue the reproductive autonomy of black women, and imply they are traitors to their communities. Images of these ads are not visible in the Heroic Media web portfolio, but rather can be found on the Internet only in news archives and blog posts that commented on the billboards and called for their removal from public space. In late 2010 and early 2011, Heroic Media provided advertisements to anti-abortion group Life Always and advised on their placement in cities across the United States, including Austin, Texas (the home of Heroic Media's

offices); New York; Los Angeles; Milwaukee; and Chicago. The campaign drew protests from these communities across the country.

Two billboards that gained this significant attention are similar in design but use different models with a difference in text that speaks directly to Heroic Media's hostility toward black women's reproductive autonomy. The first billboard shows a girl of about five or six years old who is looking at the camera in three-quarters profile with a hesitant or questioning expression. She has dark brown skin and black hair in a natural hair style, and she is wearing a ruffled pink sun dress and a pink bow in her hair. The text over her head reads: "The most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb" and an arrow over her chest announces the web address "thatsabortion.com" (see Appendix, Illustration 7). The racism in this message is egregious. It denies that black women are valuable mothers and invokes histories of white systematic violence against black communities to shame women who choose abortion. The statement that the most dangerous place for an African American is *currently* "in the womb" attacks all black women who have ever terminated a pregnancy and encourages all who haven't done so to shame and devalue them. The word "abortion" on the ad copy, missing from all other images in this study, necessitates the viewer connecting abortion to dangerous black womanhood. The rhetoric leaves black women with unexpected pregnancies only one option: to deny themselves their legal right to pregnancy termination and carry their pregnancies to term. If a black woman terminates her pregnancy, she is complicit in violence against her own race and a traitor to all black communities' efforts to develop healthy and safe environments for the next generation. This position is racist because it

names black women, who are already marginalized in the public eye and underserved by social services, as at fault for the social and economic problems that are in fact institutionalized and perpetuated by white systems of power. The message is invested in maintaining the status quo of black marginalization. It reflects a neoliberal sensibility that denies systematic oppression and makes any marginalization the fault of the individual. If the woman implied in the billboard considers her own needs, desires, and ability to be a parent, let alone her legal right to a range of reproductive options, this rhetoric constructs her as selfish and unconcerned with the strength of her community.

The second billboard is an iteration of the same image, but using a young boy subject, who also had dark brown skin and black hair and is looking directly into the camera with a slight smile. He is wearing a navy blue and white striped polo shirt. His image is in front of the altered text, which reads: "The most dangerous place for some children is in the womb" (see Appendix, Illustration 8). The euphemistic use of "some" in this copy does little to diffuse the message that black women have been destroying their communities through abortion, and any further pregnancy terminations are selfish, destructive, and unconscionable. Neither black girls nor boys have high social worth in white U.S. society and social discourses, but the black boy in this advertisement is wearing a crisp polo shirt, has close-cropped hair, and is smiling. He is the opposite of the picture of threatening--either dangerous, delinquent or poor--black masculine childhood. Clearly this boy and the properly feminine girl above represent the ideal black children that black women should aspire to produce for their communities at the expense of their own needs and reproductive freedom.

When Heroic Media placed these billboards, people in the target neighborhoods—as well as bloggers, activists, scholars, and other reporters—immediately began sharing the images through social media and organizing protests and calls for removing the billboards. Particularly visible protests came from activist Loretta Ross of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, SisterSong's Trust Black Women Partnership,<sup>37</sup> renowned scholar Dorothy Roberts,<sup>38</sup> Reverend Al Sharpton, and the mother of the young female model whose image was allegedly used outside the terms of a stock images agreement.<sup>39</sup> Community groups across the country, particularly in Manhattan and Chicago, were effective in picketing against the billboards through strong community response and action against their destructive messages.

People who make up the communities CPCs target resist the social impact of these discourses as well as the realities of having children as low-income women of color. Black children are at disproportionate risk for poor nutrition, inadequate housing, environmental pollutants, and AIDS, among other social issues (Hill Collins 2000, 197). Black infant mortality rates are also high due to poverty and inadequate access to health care. The major stumbling block to healthy pregnancies and births is inability to pay for health care services (Roberts 1997, 184), and CPCs promise both health care and funding

---

<sup>37</sup> Ross, Loretta. "Fighting Black Anti-Choice Campaigns: Trust Black Women." Ross, Loretta. "Re-enslaving African American Women." *On The Issues Magazine*. November 24, 2008. Accessed March 10, 2012. <http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2008fall/cafe2/article/22>.

<sup>38</sup> Miriam Zoila Perez interviewed Dorothy Roberts over email for the article cited below. Zoila Pérez, Miriam. "Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows." *Colorlines: News for Action*. March 3, 2011. Accessed March 10, 2012. [http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/03/past\\_and\\_present\\_collide\\_as\\_the\\_black\\_anti-abortion\\_movement\\_grows.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/03/past_and_present_collide_as_the_black_anti-abortion_movement_grows.html).

<sup>39</sup> Fisher, Janon. "Mother of Girl in Controversial Abortion Billboard Sues." *AdWeek*. April 27, 2011. Accessed March 13, 2012. <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/mother-girl-controversial-abortion-billboard-sues-131047>.

when they often provide neither. Heroic Media and other organizations promote discourses that shame and devalue black women, and people in power bring those misconceptions to the table when making decisions about reproductive policy, health care, and social services.

#### **CASE STUDY: TOOMANYABORTED.COM**

The idea of black women being marked and shamed as race traitors due to choosing abortion is intensified by organizations in the black genocide movement, including TooManyAborted.com, an organization that uses a website and advertising to reproduce the rhetoric of black abortion as genocide. TooManyAborted.com (hereafter TMA) was founded and is run by Ryan Scott Bomberger through his anti-abortion group, Radiance Foundation. It does not purport to offer reproductive health care, nor do its media products connect viewers with phone numbers or addresses of CPCs. Although its mission promises connection to local resources, the primary aim of its advertising is clearly to control public discourses around blackness and abortion. Bomberger creates and directs TMA advertising campaigns that serve its mission statement:

TooManyAborted.com educates the public about abortion's impact on the African-American community via accurate and documented statistics, historical perspectives, thought-provoking videos, and personal testimonies. We strongly encourage adoption and provide connections to local resources. Through speaking events and media campaigns, we expose the distortion and destruction of Planned Parenthood and its abortion allies.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to its multifaceted campaign against abortion and reproductive health services providers, TMA has official endorsements from five female and four male black public

---

<sup>40</sup> "Vision & Mission." TooManyAborted.com. Accessed March 12, 2012.  
[http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=226](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=226).



figures, including Dr. Aleveda King, whose bolsters her position by referencing to her uncle, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Dr. La Verne Tolbert, a former Planned Parenthood board member; and three directors and presidents of pro-life organizations.<sup>41</sup> Few other black genocide groups, such as BlackGenocide.org, Protecting Black Life, or the National Black Pro-Life Union, have such public support. TMA attracted national attention in February 2010 by sponsoring dozens of billboards in the Atlanta, Georgia area in coordination with Black History Month, and by March 2011 it had at least 170 billboards across at least five cities and states.<sup>42</sup> These factors indicate that the campaign was wide-reaching and that the organization is influential within the sphere of the black anti-abortion movement.

TMA is consistent in its message across its billboards and other types of media. TMA billboards use the same images and text as many of the print materials available in its online store, including bumper stickers, postcards, and door hangers, and it uses the photograph for many of its images. In the interest of image quality and illuminating TMA's strategy of self-representation, I use two images from its print materials in this analysis.<sup>43</sup>

The images depend on the same narrative of dangerous black motherhood as the protested Heroic Media billboards, but use visual rhetoric that makes the crisis of abortion feel even more dire. The images use the same gray scale photograph of a young

---

<sup>41</sup> "Endorsements." TooManyAborted.com. Accessed March 15, 2012. [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=126](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=126).

<sup>42</sup> Zoila Pérez, Miriam. "Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows."

<sup>43</sup> See example photographs of these images as billboards: "Black children are an endangered species" at <http://proliffeaction.org/hotline/2010/billboard/> and "Black and Unwanted" at [http://www.fox16.com/Photo.aspx?content\\_id=e0c01335-cb63-4699-890d-f2eab6318321](http://www.fox16.com/Photo.aspx?content_id=e0c01335-cb63-4699-890d-f2eab6318321)

black boy's face, half cut out of the frame. He has short dark hair and is looking just above the camera with a furrowed brow, indicating a concerned or distraught expression, and his visible eye is bright although not crying. The overall impression of the dark background, gray scale, and the subject's distress is one of negativity, fear, and disturbance. The crop of his face makes him seem static, less like an active participant in the shot and more like something to be examined. It also emphasizes his shining eye, wide open, vulnerable, and perhaps pleading for help from the otherwise-immoral and selfish black women who have considered terminating a pregnancy. This photograph fills the first image, which carries the headline "Black children are an endangered species" with "endangered species" in heavy bright orange text over the boy's forehead, and the tag line along the bottom border reads "too many aborted.com" (see Appendix, Illustration 9). This language revives the longstanding specter of black males as 'endangered' in the United States, whether due to conceptions of black masculinity as a social problem or due to black men's status as at risk for under-achievement, unemployment, and homicide.<sup>44</sup> The discourse of black male genocide began in the 1960s, and by the 1980s was regularly called "the black male endangered species." It appeared regularly in black political and cultural politics from the late 1980s through the 1990s (Ross 1998, 603-604). This rhetoric clearly resonates with current anti-abortion movements like TMA who use it to manipulate black women and their communities.

---

<sup>44</sup> Extensive scholarship has been done on this topic. See especially the influential works below.  
Gibbs, J. T., ed. 1988. *Young, Black, and Male in America: An Endangered Species*. Dover, Mass.: Auburn House.  
Jawanza, Kunjufu. 1984-1985. *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, rev. ed., 2 vols. Chicago: African American Images.  
Hare, Nathan and Julia Hare. 1984. *The Endangered Black Family: Coping with the Unisexualization and Coming Extinction of the Black Race*. San Francisco: Black Think Tank.

While the protested Heroic Media billboards presented idealized versions of 'proper' and contained black children, TMA uses this scare narrative that presents the welfare of black children as entirely determined by black women's personal reproductive decisions. Significantly, the narrative seems to target not just women, as the Vitae Foundation and first Heroic Media billboards do, but also the men who are invested in the family structures that are the focus of the TMA advertisements. If TMA can influence black men's attitudes about abortion to the extent that the men try to keep their partners from accessing a full range of reproductive options, the organization will have gained valuable allies in its push to control narratives about black women's reproduction.

The second image continues the rhetoric of the first example, but places its text center stage. It uses the same photograph but in a horizontal orientation, leaving a broad swath of space to the left of the photograph for bright yellow text reading "ENDANGERED." and the website name in white text below (see Appendix, Illustration 10). Who is doing the endangering? Miriam Zoila Perez notes in a Colorlines article that black genocide organizations, including TMA and the Radiance Foundation, use terms like "endangered," "genocide," and "holocaust" that imply "a larger conspiracy, perhaps promoted by government, to threaten the black community. And like other public health conspiracy theories that have circulated in black neighborhoods over the years, the assertion is rooted in a very real and troubling history."<sup>45</sup> This important argument introduces another way in which TMA's narrative attacks black women: in addition to being reckless and murderous, black women who have terminated or considered

---

<sup>45</sup> Zoila Pérez, Miriam. "Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows."

terminating a pregnancy are taken in by manipulative 'abortionists' or government agencies, witless against the power of white hegemony in a way analogous to the young black boy helpless against the threat of abortion.

Influential anti-racism activists have identified and acted on these destructive discourses of black reproduction and womanhood. Social justice advocate Loretta Ross, founder and national coordinator of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, established an organization called the Trust Black Women Coalition to respond to racist anti-abortion attacks. She responded to the TMA advertisements with the following statement that connects gender to the themes discussed above:

It was not accidental that they chose a black *male* child to feature in their messaging, exacerbating gender tensions in the African American community. We decided that the best approach was to emphasize our opponents' negative subliminal messages about black women. Either we were dupes of abortion providers, or we were evil women intent on having abortions – especially of black male children – for selfish reasons. In their first narrative, we were victims without agency unable to make our own decisions, pawns of racist, profit-driven abortion providers. In their second narrative, we were the uncaring enemies of our own children, and architects of black genocide.<sup>46</sup>

This clear analysis points to the discourse of the ruthless, emasculating black woman whose reproductive freedom is in collusion with the white man. Like in Heroic Media's advertising, these themes are prominent across anti-black abortion rhetoric in general: SisterSong played a primary role in working to remove the Heroic Media advertisements, and they continue to organize for just and respectful representation of women of color in the media and, even more crucially, for fair and accessible reproductive health care for communities that are currently marginalized by the white systems in power.

---

<sup>46</sup> Ross, Loretta. "Fighting Black Anti-Choice Campaigns: Trust Black Women."

## CASE STUDY: CARE NET AND URBAN INITIATIVES

Care Net, an organization that represents hundreds of crisis pregnancy centers, has a mission and outreach strategy that illustrate how CPCs approach black and urban communities with paternalistic control over the reproductive lives of women of color. It is an umbrella organization in both scope and organizational function, reporting that its "network of more than 1,100 pregnancy centers offer [sic] hope to women facing unplanned pregnancies by providing practical help and emotional support" across the United States and Canada.<sup>47</sup> Although it describes its approach as "refreshingly apolitical and practical,"<sup>48</sup> this organization's mission statement on using the hope of Jesus Christ to reach hurting and broken women uses language that is loaded with assumptions about the mental states and autonomy of people who are facing unplanned pregnancies.<sup>49</sup> The value judgments Care Net makes about the demographics of those communities are also clear from its website, including racial identity and socioeconomic status.

The racial politics of Care Net are explicit from its "Our Work" page, which describes the goals and campaigns of the organization.<sup>50</sup> It first reports on Care Net's advertising strategies, including use of Internet media, billboards, bus shelter placards, and "cable television ad buys on BET and MTV," which announces two of its target audiences as black media consumers and young adults generally. Then, under the subheading "Planting," it explains that,

[s]adly, Hispanic and black women make up only 27% of the total female population, but account for 59% of abortions. Recognizing that over 94% of the

---

<sup>47</sup> "Care Net | About Us." Care Net. Accessed March 10, 2012. <https://www.care-net.org/aboutus/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Care Net | Newsroom." Care Net. Accessed March 10, 2012. <https://www.care-net.org/newsroom/>.

<sup>49</sup> "Care Net | Our Work." Care Net. Accessed March 10, 2012. <https://www.care-net.org/ourwork/>.

<sup>50</sup> "Care Net | Our Work."

nation's abortion providers are located in metropolitan areas, many of which are predominantly minority populated, Care Net is strategically planting new pregnancy centers in these urban communities.

This language implies that the primary reason for abortion providers concentrated in urban areas is that women of color seek abortions at unreasonable rates. In reality, there are multiple reasons for higher numbers of clinics in cities, including population density and availability of funding. Because of funding cuts and shrinking availability of reproductive services, many women are forced to travel to urban centers to receive the care they need. Care Net does not acknowledge these complex factors, and instead frames their report as "sad" and expresses concern for black and Hispanic women in particular. It does not offer any reasons for the higher abortion rate, and it is unlikely that its concern is regarding the systematic forces behind disproportionate numbers of unplanned pregnancies in these communities. Instead it frames abortion as a tragedy and women of color as both its perpetrators and its victims.

This "Our Work" page, describing Care Net's work and the above statistics about the "epidemic proportions" of abortions in inner-city communities, is headed with a banner photograph of two blond women in bright, soft lighting, looking at a booklet together (see Appendix, Illustration 11). This image looms over the page in sharp contrast to the inherent idea of black sexuality as iconic of sexual deviance, as has been a common public discourse since the eighteenth century (Gilman 1985, 228). Black women's unplanned pregnancies and subsequent abortions are deviant and threatening, requiring management, control, and 'targeting' by a frightened and powerful white majority. Black women's sexuality outside of marriage leaves their bodies expendable,

part of the the trope of black “fallen womanhood” that includes a lack of legal and social support (hooks 1992, 66). The white women use black women's bodies here to support a political point under the proclamation that those women need their help.

Black female representation in Care Net's promotional materials speaks to how the organization contributes to public discourses around pregnancy and whose voice is most important in reproductive decisions. The materials that are meant to take up public space include three posters for purchase and distribution from an online store. Of particular note are the compositional treatments of the women featured: the two Latinas are looking away from the camera with neutral expressions. The poster depicting a black woman shows her wearing all white under a white blanket, arms folded, with her head cropped almost entirely out of the picture (see Appendix, Illustration 12). As Care Net is explicit about black women as a target population, it is notable that the dynamics of this poster align closely with the control and Otherness dynamics of the “Our Work” example above: the lack of a full head or face on the woman speaks very clearly to the documented tradition of white fascination with black “decontextualized anatomy,” which became conflated with the body of the prostitute, or a figure of “unbridled sexuality” (Gilman 1985, 232, 248). Black female models often appear in portraits that “make them look less like humans and more like mannequins or robots” (hooks 1992, 71), which removes any elements of threatening black sexuality. Pains have been taken in this photograph to neutralize this threat, thus disallowing any sexuality or sexual agency for the subject. Whiteness signifies virginity, and the woman is prone and submissive, with hands lying protectively across her (presumably) pregnant abdomen. All of the signifiers

of virtuous, white femininity and selfless motherhood are compiled here, potentially in order to counteract the taboo sexuality embedded in discourses of black femininity.

Whiteness in this image has an additional, more insidious role: in clothing the figure, the white robes do not just neutralize black taboo sexuality but fully engulf her body's core and everything that surrounds her. Whiteness is literally overtaking the subject who, already headless, has no agency and is lying prone and vulnerable to any force: in this case, Care Net and its implicit mission and aesthetic of whiteness as savior.

Further factors in the image signify discourses of black sexuality requiring management from white institutional structures like CPCs. Outside of its context, the image is glamorous: the woman's bedding and model-like posing connote affluence, while the scene also suggests sex and romance. Care Net could intend these factors to counteract the stereotype of 'tough' black femininity and draw in readers with an image that skews toward positive representation; however, the model's face reflects Care Net's Othering policies. In contrast to the high-focus pout of the Latina subject in Vitae Foundation's advertisement, the black woman's lips here are in profile, the only part of her face visible, not speaking, smiling, or expressing. The literal and figurative blankness of the faceless, white-enrobed figure may offer a template on which prospective female clients can inscribe their own situation, as Swope (1998,) suggests is effective advertising. However, black women in advertising are very rarely "there to document the beauty of black skin, of black bodies, but rather to call attention to other concerns" (hooks 1992, 71). Read alongside traditions of black representation and Care Net's own



outreach goals, this poster overwhelmingly signifies containment of black women's sexuality.

### **NEOLIBERAL RHETORIC, POLICY, AND THE BLACK WELFARE MOTHER**

There is an overt relationship between neoliberal U.S. politics and the policies controlling and devaluing black reproduction. Neoliberal investments in capitalism, economic efficiency, self-sufficiency, and bootstraps abandoned the communities underserved by structural inequalities. Capitalist class relations in the U.S. have been especially invested in controlling black women's bodies and reproduction through objectification, commodification, and exploitation, as discussed previously in this chapter (Rousseau 2009, 132). The eugenical idea of treating citizens as commodities-- by using economics to judge their contributions to society-- was "perfectly suited to the ideological needs of the young monopoly capitalists" (Davis 1983, 213). Any person who was not an actively producing and consuming subject in the U.S. public imaginary, like poor women and children of color, was not valuable to the system.

The U.S. popular imaginary is still tied to the 1990s trope of the black welfare mother, a poor, working-class black woman whose uncontrollable reproduction produces offspring who monopolize the public funds to which they are legally entitled (Hill Collins 2000, 78; Rousseau 2009, 138-9; for example). As Dorothy Roberts (1997, 243) states, U.S. popular discourse clings "to the myths that welfare breeds irresponsible childbirth, perpetuates poverty, and encourages dependency," dangerous stereotypes that made welfare reform palatable to those in power. Welfare reform, or the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), saved the

government funds by pushing poor Americans off of public assistance. This was palatable to the white mainstream partially because of its conception of the welfare mother as the cause of both her own poverty and that of black communities. Because black women are treated as a scapegoat for the ghettoization of black America, the angle of vision is shifted away from structural sources of poverty (Rousseau 2009, 138; Hill Collins 2000, 80).

The language of "personal responsibility" in PRWORA illustrates this neoliberal priority of dismissing structural hierarchies while justifying the paternalistic slant of the act. In her discussion of welfare reform in the neoliberal era, Nicole Rousseau (2000, 144; emphasis in the original) notes how

the state; reminiscent of the *White man's burden* of a century before; claims a *responsibility* to *train* Black women how to become contributing members of society. This means she must be *taught* to take financial responsibility for her own children and *earn* her right to a public safety net, by working in the wage labor system. This is of course ironic, as Black women have historically been significant assets to the U.S. labor system, as both slave and wage laborers.

While black women continue to be significant contributors to the labor system, their reproductive lives are monetized and manipulated by current neoliberal policies. Instead of widespread forced sterilization, now "the state offers cash incentives to the same populations previously documented as *undesirable*, paying them to take long-acting birth control *voluntarily*" (144). These are meant to prevent the births of new children who will be in need of government funding; therefore, these policies are truly only meant to be utilized by poor women and communities who are desperate for financial security, and the discourses of personal responsibility mean that any poor woman who does not take

advantage of these 'opportunities' is solely to blame for any deprivation her children face when the government implements policies like PRWORA.

## **DISCUSSION**

This chapter helps demonstrate how anti-abortion organizations use long-standing discourses of black pregnancy and motherhood in shaping current discourses around black women's childbearing, abortion, and economic worth. The print marketing from Heroic Media indicates which modes of black motherhood are valuable and which are unconscionable, while billboards by TooManyAborted.com work from similar discourses to shame black women who terminate or consider terminating a pregnancy. Finally, Care Net aims to contain wanton black female sexuality through targeting urban communities and positioning itself as the white savior. These current discourses, alongside recent neoliberal reproductive politics and a long history of medical mistreatment, are stacked against black women and communities who are working for fair treatment and representation. Women of color organizing has a history of resisting population control measures, and it is now fighting back against crisis pregnancy centers, their manipulative policies, and their destructive representations. Loretta Ross, SisterSong, and the Trust Black Women Coalition have given context to their work by emphasizing that it was black women who asked Margaret Sanger to bring clinics to black neighborhoods, and black women who now support Planned Parenthood and use their wide range of health services.<sup>51</sup> Scholars and anti-racist activists can look toward these examples as models of doing intersectional work that benefits targeted communities by working with those

---

<sup>51</sup> Zoila Perez, Miriam. "Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows."

communities and according to their needs. Building a unified front against the organizations that control these shaming and paternalistic discourses should be a priority of those working for anti-racist reproductive justice in the realms of both popular discourse and federally-funded public policy.

## **Conclusion**

Anti-abortion discourses approach race with entrenched stereotypes, paternalistic moralizing, and euphemistic concern for the low-income brown communities whose reproductive freedoms are accosted by crisis pregnancy center manipulation and political agendas. As I discussed in Chapter One, CPCs and anti-abortion organizations have particular targets and use large-scale media advertising to retain disproportionate control over the image of abortion in the U.S. cultural imaginary. Chapter Two details how that imaginary and the current political situation overlap in immigration, population, and border panic that reduces Latinas to sexualized stereotypes. Vitae Foundation represents Latinas according to these tropes, portraying them and their pregnancies as caricatures easily incorporated into anti-immigration political sentiments. In Chapter Three, I report on the U.S. medical and political systems' shameful oppression of black women's reproductive freedom in order to situate the advertising rhetoric of three more anti-abortion organizations. Heroic Media and TooManyAborted.com both distribute cultural commentary that lectures and shames black women on how to do pregnancy 'right,' and Care Net's outreach tactics set up an organized attack on low-income urban communities that are in most need of responsible and respectful reproductive care. The discourses these organizations perpetrate are all reflected in the individualism and bootstraps of a growing neoliberal social politic, which I describe in closing the chapter.

Although these findings are significant to building a more comprehensive understanding of how racial politics, reproductive control, and neoliberal policy overlap,

the study begs further research regarding sample, topics addressed, and a shifting field. First of all, although the organizations featured here are wide-reaching in their scope and impact, they only represent four contributing voices to the larger patterns of anti-abortion discourse. Restricting my analyses to the advertising meant for public space also limited the scope of the study; for example, booklets and pamphlets with more text, and information that is meant to be educational or instructive, would necessarily have contributed different strains to the discourses in question.

Second, more necessary questions about popular discourses arose during the course of research that require further work. The question of 'crisis' and its meanings seems central to the conversation: what does the 'crisis' in CPC look like within these discourses, and why are some narratives (older parents, people who already have several children, people experiencing intimate partner violence) missing from CPC advertisements? Also, many anti-abortion organizations are legal nonprofits or run through religious institutions: what does it mean when CPCs situate their work as charitable outreach? What does charity look like, and within common discourses, who is meant to be on which ends of charitable service? Finally, when race is implicated in any of these questions, and in the preceding chapters, whiteness is often left out of the equation as default, neutral, and 'raceless.' Interrogating whiteness specifically within these narratives, and within the advertising, is necessary for comprehensive work on race and representation.

A shifting rhetorical field, as the third concern or overarching limitation, has even been apparent over the course of writing this project. I first began investigating CPCs,

including Vitae Foundation, Care Net, and others, in late 2010, and by late 2011 the other CPCs had changed their web presence to reflect to a more 'multicultural' model of representation. Then, even in the last weeks of compiling this text, between March and early April 2012, Care Net has kept its original page static while launching an entire new partner website. Its title is Care Net Urban Initiative and it has many pages worth of information and organizing tools, all designed using images that reflect a positive multicultural model of representation.<sup>52</sup> In 2010, Planned Parenthood was the only large-scale reproductive health care provider that I found that depicted multi-racial groups of smiling women and families in its advertising.<sup>53</sup> If CPCs are truly adopting (or co-opting) this advertising trend, I believe that trend and its implications must be the first point for future research to address.

Despite the limited scope of this project, its stakes are high. The advertisements and promotional materials of each of these organizations clearly illustrate “[t]he concept of stratified reproduction,” which “helps us see the arrangements by which some reproductive futures are valued while others are despised” (Chavez 2008, 73). Anti-abortion discourses are explicit about whose reproductive freedoms should be celebrated and whose require state and social control through public shaming and public policy.

The urgency of investigating this egregious rhetoric becomes clear when it is read alongside anti-abortion legislation that is increasing in frequency, and, is so extreme that many have compared it to the dystopic totalitarian world of Margaret Atwood's *The*

---

<sup>52</sup> "Care Net Urban-News." Care Net. Accessed April 01, 2012. <http://careneturban.org/>.

<sup>53</sup> For an example of this kind of imagery, see Planned Parenthood's teen information page: "Info for Teens." Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Accessed April 8, 2012. <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/info-for-teens/>.

*Handmaid's Tale*, wherein women populate a caste system based on reproductive capacity.<sup>54</sup> In the past week of finalizing this current project, a proposed Arizona bill has continued the 2011 trend of devastating abortion statutes: this amendment to H.B. 2036 allows gestational age to be calculated up to two weeks *prior to conception*,<sup>55</sup> and it passed 20-10 in the House and is expected to pass easily in the Senate. This amendment is widely acknowledged to intend to further strain women's access to abortion within the existing window of twenty-week gestational age. I include this extended example not because it is outstanding but because it fits seamlessly into the trend of extreme restrictions not only being discussed seriously among state legislatures but easily passing into law. This week, Mississippi is instituting a law that will likely close the state's only remaining abortion provider.<sup>56</sup> Lawmakers and politicians are not putting these measures through in isolation; neoliberal policy and patriarchal, reductive rhetoric help create a pervasive and dangerous anti-abortion discourse.

In sum, fraudulent anti-abortion organizations use neoliberal themes and racialized advertising to perpetuate destructive discourses of what it means to be a person of color in reproductive crisis and to target these historically and socially underserved women. CPCs and affiliated groups are setting a dangerous example of devaluation, disrespect, and control in their racist rhetoric and policies that have true consequences for women of color and their reproductive futures. The more academic and public attention is

---

<sup>54</sup> Atwood, Margaret. 1987. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Ballantine.

<sup>55</sup> Find the full text of the amendment here:

"Committee on Judiciary Senate Amendments to H.B. 2036." Accessed April 7, 2012. PDF file. <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/50leg/2r/adopted/s.2036jud.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Fausset, Richard. "Mississippi Appears Poised to Close State's Sole Abortion Clinic." Los Angeles Times. April 6, 2012. Accessed April 8, 2012. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-mississippi-abortion-issue-20120406,0,4316068.story>.



paid to these deceptive health tactics and problematic racial representations, the stronger the potential avenues for lobbying their sources in the federal government to give underserved populations the respect and reproductive freedom they deserve.

## Appendix



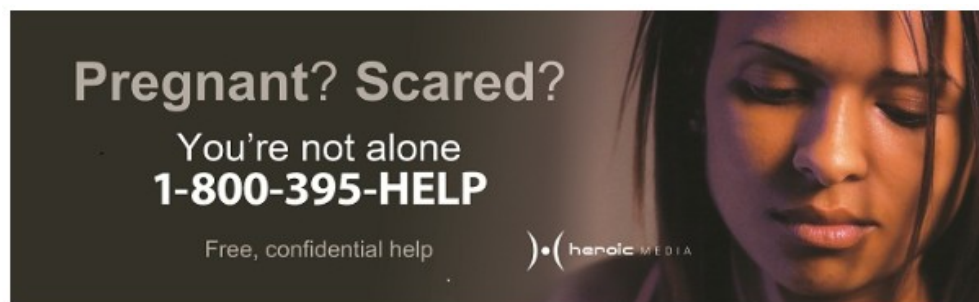
*Illustration 1*



*Illustration 2*

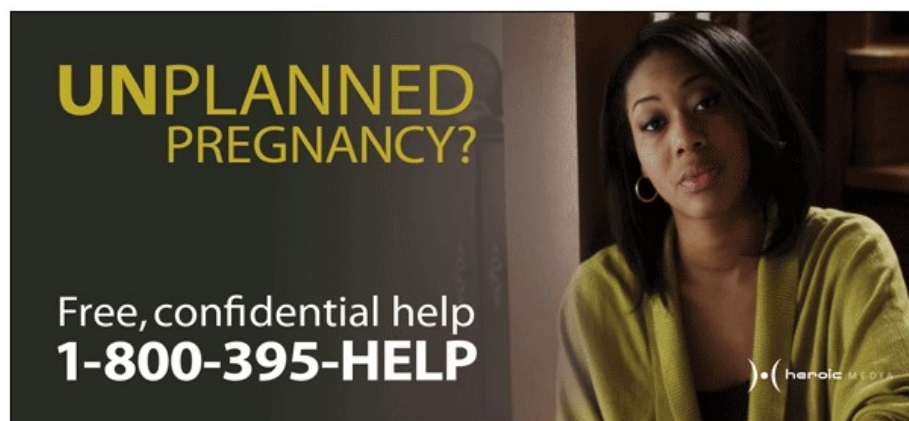


*Illustration 3*



"We Can Help" Billboard

*Illustration 4*



"Unplanned" Billboard

*Illustration 5*



"Ultimatum" Billboard  
*Illustration 6*

57

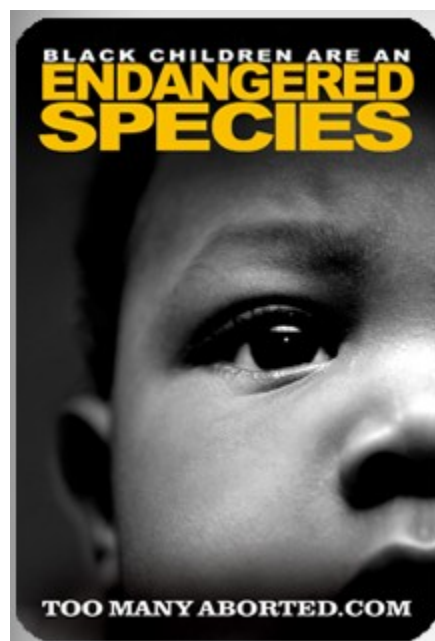


*Illustration 7*

<sup>57</sup> Photograph by CBS photographer Juliet Papa, accompanying the following article:  
 "Controversial Anti-Abortion Billboard Causes Stir in SoHo." CBS New York News. February 23,  
 2011. Accessed March 29, 2012. <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2011/02/23/controversial-anti-abortion-billboard-goes-up-in-soho/>.



*Illustration 8*

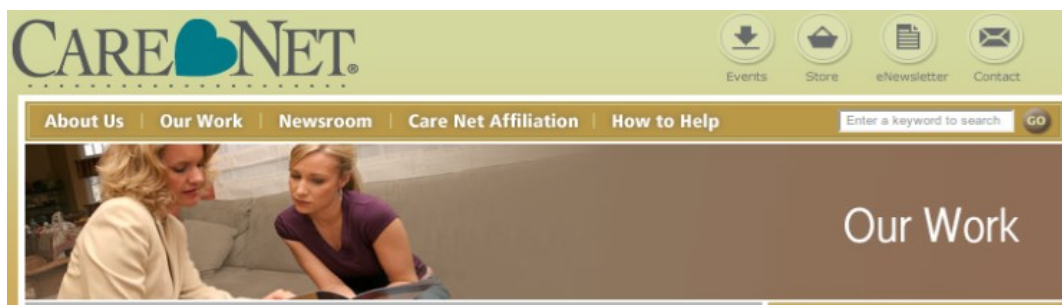


*Illustration 9*

<sup>58</sup> Screen shot of a December 22, 2010 news report on Austin, Texas television station KXAN. Hartmann, Margaret. "Another Anti-Abortion Ad Campaign Targets African-Americans." Jezebel.com. December 23, 2010. Accessed March 29, 2012. <http://jezebel.com/5717047/another-anti-abortion-ad-campaign-targets-african-americans>.



*Illustration 10*



*Illustration 11*



*Illustration 12*

## References

Brown, Wendy. 2003. "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." *Theory & Event* 7 (1): paragraphs 1-43.

Chavez, Leo. 2008. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Stanford, MD: Stanford University Press.

Cohen, Susan A. 2008. "Abortion and Women of Color: The Bigger Picture." *Guttmacher Policy Review* 11 (3): 2-5,12.

Condit, Celeste Michelle. 1990. *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Coles, Mandy, Kevin K. Makino, Nancy L. Stanwood, Ann Dozier, and Jonathan D. Klein. 2010. "How Are Restricted Abortion Statues Associated with Unintended Teen Birth?" *Journal of Adolescent Health* 47: 160-167.

Dávila, Arlene. 2001. *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



Davis, Angela Y. 1983. *Women, Race, & Class*. New York: Vintage Books.

Dyer, Richard. 2007. *White*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 147-166.

——— and Christina Schraff. 2011. "Introduction." In *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, edited by Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, 1-20. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gilman, Sander. 1985. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." In *Race, Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr, 223-261. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1992. "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power." In *Formations of Modernity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben. Oxford: Polity Press.



———. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Ltd with The Open University.

Harvey, David. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

hooks, bell. 1992. "Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of black female sexuality in the cultural marketplace." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, edited by bell hooks, 61-77. Boston: South End Press.

Hopkins, Nick, Suzanne Zeedyk, and Fiona Raitt. 2005. "Visualising Abortion: Emotion Discourse and Fetal Imagery in a Contemporary Abortion Debate." *Social Science & Medicine* 61: 393-403.

Lazar, Michelle M. 2005. "Politicizing Gender in Discourse: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as Political Perspective and Praxis." In *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*, edited by Michelle M. Lazar, 1-28. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.

———. 2007. "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis." *Critical Discourse Studies* 4 (2): 141-164.

Medoff, Marshall H. 2009. "The Relationship between State Abortion Policies and Abortion Providers." *Gender Issues* 26: 224-237.

Mendible, Myra. 2007. "Introduction: Embodying Latinidad: An Overview." In *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, edited by Myra Mendible, 1-28. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Petchesky, Rosalind Pollack. 1987. Fetal images: the power of visual culture in the politics of reproduction. *Feminist Studies* 13 (2): 263-292.

Rholinger, Deana A. and Jesse Klein. 2011. "Visual Landscapes and the Abortion Issue." *American Behavioral Scientist* 20 (10): 1-17.

Richardson, Chinue Turner and Elizabeth Nash. 2006. "Misinformed Consent: The Medical Accuracy of State-Developed Abortion Counseling Materials." *Guttmacher Policy Review* 9 (4): 6-11.

Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage Books.

Ross, Marlon B. 1998. "In Search of Black Men's Masculinities." *Feminist Studies* 24 (3): 599-626.

Rousseau, Nicole. 2009. *Black Woman's Burden: Commodifying Black Reproduction*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Steiner, Mark Allan. 2006. *The Rhetoric of Operation Rescue: Projecting the Christian Pro-Life Message*. New York: T & T Clark.

Swope, Paul. 1998. "Abortion: A Failure to Communicate." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 82: 31-35.

Valdivia, Angharad. 2007. "Is Penelope to J. Lo as Culture is to Nature? Eurocentric Approaches to 'Latin' Beauties." In *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, edited by Myra Mendible, 129-148. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.